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ARTINGALE CASTLE.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ARTINGALE CASTLE.

BOOK III.—*continued.*

WHO IS ARTINGALE OF ARTINGALE?

CHAPTER V.

AT THE COTTAGE PORCH.

THE special, avowed object of Felix Farland's walk that morning to the cottage was to pay a visit to Mr. Purcell Lancaster. His father had desired him to lose no time in doing so, both because he wished to show every attention and kindness to the friend and protégé of his old friends the Henningtrees, and because he was desirous of at once imparting to the young architect his own ideas respecting the restoration of the Castle. The occasion of the visit to the cottage, however, in no wise unfitted it for the purpose of George Fraser. He would be able to see in half a minute the sort of terms on which Farland stood with the young artist, and

he had no objection to making the acquaintance of Lancaster.

As the two young men walked up to the cottage door, Bertha met them in the porch.

“Good morning, Bertha,” said Farland; “how is old Hannah?”

Bertha made a very pretty little courtesy as she said, “Thank you, Mr. Felix; grandmother is pretty well—as well as usual. Will you please to walk in?”

“I came this morning to call on your new lodger, Mr. Lancaster; and my friend Mr. Fraser wished to do so too.”

There was no sort of pretence of presenting George to Miss Donne; she was evidently, in Farland’s estimation, not of sufficient social importance to warrant such a ceremony. But George, when Farland mentioned him, seized the opportunity of bowing to the little lady; and she, almost venturing to steal a glance up at his face as she did so, courtesied deeply in return for his salutation.

“Mr. Lancaster is not at home, Mr. Felix,” she said; “he has gone to wait upon Sir Hildebrand.”

“Bah! I thought we should have been early

enough to catch him. Well, be so good as to give him this card, and tell him, my father sends his compliments, and hopes to have the pleasure of seeing him very shortly. Will you leave a card, Fraser?"

"I have not got such a thing; but I will call again in the hope of finding Mr. Lancaster—if Miss Bertha will permit me?"

George blushed, and was conscious that he did so, when he called her by her Christian name; but he was obliged to do so, for want of knowing any other. If he had heard it from the captain, he had forgotten it; and on the well-remembered morning at Farlandstoke everybody had called her Bertha. Bertha blushed too when she heard her name from his lips, though no closest self-examination would have enabled her to say why; and she merely courtesied again in reply.

"And so old Hannah is all right, eh? Not in want of a fresh supply of snuff yet, eh? I must bring her a parcel some of these days. Well, I'll go in and ask her how she does."

"Thank you, Mr. Felix; she will be very glad to see you," said Bertha, simply, and without the least embarrassment.

"It is all right enough," thought Fraser, to himself; "there is no mistake about it; he has never had a thought in his empty head about her, one way or another; nor has it ever come into her head that he could look on her as aught save a little child." And the infinite delight he was conscious of, as the certainty flashed upon him, was sufficient to have convinced Captain Curling, could that veteran misogynist have known it, that his young friend was indeed steering a false course, and had altogether lost sight of the port he was bound for.

Bertha turned to lead the way into the cottage; and the two young men following, found old Hannah sitting in her easy-chair in her usual spot, chosen so that she was able to see from the window the village church and the long perspective of the valley beyond it.

"Here is young Mr. Farland come to see you, granny," said her granddaughter.

"My duty to him! he is very kind," said the old woman, as if he had not been present.

"And this is Mr. Fraser, come to call on Mr. Lancaster," continued Bertha, in her office of chamberlain.

"Come to call on who?" cried the old woman.

“On Mr. Lancaster, granny—the gentleman who has come to lodge with us.”

“Oh! he be come to call on he, be a’,” grumbled the old woman.

While these words were being spoken Felix had stepped up to the side of old Hannah’s chair, crossing the window for the purpose of doing so; and Fraser, following him, mainly because Bertha had also taken her stand on the other side of her grandmother’s chair, and he was thus left standing out by the door alone, also passed between the old woman and the light. But no sooner had she thus got a good view of him than the sight of him appeared to affect her in a most surprising manner.

Clutching both the arms of her easy-chair with two shaking hands, she half raised herself in her seat, and staring almost wildly at him for a few seconds without speaking, she cried out aloud, at the top of her cracked voice—

“*Who* be it? *Who*? Lord ha’ mercy upon us! *Who* be you?”

“Why, granny, dear, this is Mr. Fraser, a friend of Mr. Farland’s,” said Bertha, greatly distressed, and looking apologetically from one to the other of the young men.

Old Hannah sank down into her seat again, but raising her hand so as to shade her eyes, continued to gaze on Fraser, as if fascinated.

Felix looked at Fraser and laughed. "Old Hannah is not accustomed to see a taller man than I am in her cottage, and you frighten her."

"Lord ha' mercy!" said the old woman, still continuing her gaze at the young American from under the shelter of her hand held up to her brow; "why, I could ha' sworn—Who *be* the gentleman? And where did a' come from?"

"I hail from Salem, mistress, in Massachusetts State in North America, and my name is George Fraser, at your service. Did you think then that you had ever seen me before?"

"Ameriky! North Ameriky!" muttered the old woman, musing to herself. "No, sir, I can't say as I ever saw you afore. I beg your pardon, sir."

"No offence, mistress, none in the least," said George, smiling frankly and good-humouredly. "I am sorry I startled you. Perhaps you once knew somebody like me?"

"Maybe, maybe," said old Hannah, still

continuing her curious peering gaze into his face. "Well," she went on muttering to herself, rather than speaking to those present; "I never did! I never thought to see that face again. Any ways, again I humbly beg your pardon, sir!" she went on, addressing Fraser; "ah, yes, I did know a gentleman once upon a time as was like you; and it is no offence to say so, for he was one of the handsomest gentlemen as ever was seen, and as tall as you are. I could ha' sworn—Ameriky, too! You come from Ameriky, do you, sir?"

"Yes, mistress, I come from America,—from Salem town," said Fraser, still smiling, though feeling a little embarrassed at Hannah's compliments to his personal appearance.

"Well," she said at length, taking her hand down from her eyes, "I be an old fool; and I humbly beg your pardon, sir."

"Not at all, not at all, mistress; you must let me come and see you again, if I remind you so much of your old friend," said Fraser, kindly.

"If you please, sir; you are heartily welcome, whenever you please to look in."

"Good-bye, mistress; I shall be sure to come and see you again," said Fraser.

“Good-bye, Hannah. I will come again with Mr. Fraser, and we will bring you a supply of your favourite mixture.”

And the two young men turned to leave the cottage, and Bertha went to open the door for them.

“Have you any idea, miss,” said George, aside to Bertha, as they stood at the door, “who it is that your grandmother thinks I am so like?”

“Indeed no, sir,” said Bertha, standing with the door in her hand, and her eyes cast down under their long lashes to the floor.

“She seemed quite disturbed,” said Fraser; “I suppose your grandmother never was in America?”

“Oh no, sir; I am sure she never was,” replied Bertha, stepping into the porch, and ready to make her courtesy to her departing guests.

“Oh, you startled her, that was all. Hannah is not accustomed to see strangers,” said Felix. “Good-bye, Bertha.”

“Good-bye, miss; you grandmother has given me leave, you know, to come again; and perhaps when I come I may be able to persuade you to show me some other of your drawings. Perhaps you do not remember that I was at

Mr. Farland's when they were all looking at the drawing young Mr. Farland bought?"

"Oh yes, sir, I remember that you were there," said Bertha, standing now at the entrance of the porch, and resting one tiny little hand on the trellis work, which supported a creeping rose, while with the other she was bending into position a twig—a task which evidently needed the entire service of her eyes.

Farland had gone on meanwhile a few steps on his way down the path; but George still lingered a moment at the porch.

"Will you show me some more of your work?" he asked, looking down on her bent head. Her face was entirely hidden from him by her attitude; but he could mark the pretty shape of the small head, the lovely colour and quality of the chesnut hair, parted down the middle of the little round head with scrupulous exactitude, and showing all kinds of pretty tints and lights and shades where the sunlight fell on its glossy ripples; he could see the back of the white slender neck, the small transparent ears, and the beautiful lines of the lower edge of one cheek.

"Will you let me see some other of your

drawings?" he said again. And still Bertha made no answer. She could not speak to him; for simple and commonplace as the words were, and though she could not even see the face of the speaker as he uttered them, Bertha knew from them that he who was speaking to her loved her, and that he was telling her so. Would she have felt similarly if young Mr. Farland had asked her to show him some more of her drawings? or if any other human being had spoken the words? Most assuredly she would not. And where was the difference? what was the magic spell in the words as uttered by George Fraser? Bertha could not have thrown the slightest light on the subject if her life had depended on her doing so. It seemed to her as if the whole of those minutes, during which she had been conscious that he was looking at her at Mr. Farland's house, that memorable morning, and all her feelings during them were reproduced in her mind, with an accompanying commentary and gloss explanatory of them, which made the sense and meaning of them perfectly clear. A more inexperienced heart in such matters than that of poor little Bertha could not exist. No man had ever looked at

her so before. No man had ever spoken of love to her either by tongue or by eye. Yet she knew that this man, seen now for the second or third time, loved her.

And what would her feeling have been if another than he *had* so looked and spoken? This was the tenor of Bertha's after self-examination. She would, she told herself, have felt pained and offended, and would have taken ample care never again to find herself alone with the person so acting. But in the case of George Fraser, the present offender? Ah, that was so different. And what was the difference? And little Bertha's delicate cheek grew crimson at the thought of the answer to her own question in the solitude of her own chamber.

"I thought that one very beautiful. They all of them said it was so excellently done. But I did not dare to say anything—Bertha! If I had said anything I must have told you that there was one thing a great deal prettier than the drawing to me, and that I loved to look at much more—don't you know what that thing was, Bertha?—the artist."

And as he spoke he suddenly bent his head, and pressed his lips for half a second to the top

of the little round glossy head, just where the shining hair was parted; and in the next instant darted down the path after young Farland.

Bertha remained for a minute or two after he was gone, standing precisely in the same position, without moving hand or foot or eye,—not even to look after him, as he went. Then she sank down on one of the seats in the porch, and began to try to think. What was this immense, this immeasurable thing, that had fallen upon her, changing everything, changing the entire world in its relationship to her, and changing her to herself? Was it a good thing, God-sent, to be welcomed, acquiesced in, rejoiced over? Or was it a shape of fear, the end of all peacefulness of heart, an evil influence to be fought against, struggled against for dear life, and driven away from her? Was she glad? Was she sorry? Of a surety she was frightened. Would she wish that it were all a dream and a mistake? Would she return to be as she was an hour ago? Ah! no, no, no!—a thousand times no! Thus questioned, she could not hide the truth from herself that the consciousness which had reached her mind was ineffably dear to her;—that the new light in which every

object, every thought showed itself to her was a gilding beam, the brightness of which caused every other light to pale before it.

But was it true? Was it no illusion of the brain? no horrible blunder and mistake? The thought made her throbbing pulses pause suddenly in their beating, checked her breath, and spread a deadly paleness over her face, to be succeeded in the next instant by a flush of hot blood.

No; her inmost heart, her truest consciousness told her that of a surety there was no mistaking the meaning of that voice, and of those words.

And why was it sweet to her to be loved by this man, so recently a stranger? Because she loved him,—oh, so far more dearly than she had ever loved any thing or any body before. But how came so strange a thing about? Why did she love this George Fraser,—him, and him only,—him, and no other—she who had never loved, or dreamed of loving any man? How or why had this come to pass? Was it enchantment? Was it literally because, as the song says, he had “looked on her with his bonny blue eye?” And Bertha comforted her heart by telling it that this could not be, since

others had bonny blue eyes, and might have looked, as she knew well, long enough before any similar result had followed. But why then in this case? And Bertha, like wiser folk who have tried to answer the same question, found that answer there was none. He was so good, so noble. But how had she found that out? Simply by looking at him? Bertha could not tell that; but she could as soon have doubted of her own existence as of the goodness and nobleness. And that such an one,—oh wonder, joy, and thankfulness!—that such an one should have found out her in her lowly obscurity, and given her all his love!

'Twas passing strange, and sweet as it was strange; and then—

"Bertha! Bertha! Why, whatever are you about? Why don't you come back from the door?" cried the thin and cracked voice of her grandmother, rousing the poor child from her day-dreams and maiden meditations—no longer fancy-free—to all the dull vulgarities of the daily life around her, with the suddenness and shock of a plunge into cold water.

"Coming, granny dear, coming!" replied Bertha, hurrying back to her usual round of

petty cares and duties, and giving to them all her mind, save that, ever and anon throughout the day, a sudden beam of the new dawn that had risen on her life would shoot athwart it, and gild with a strange glory the poorest details of it.

Old Hannah seemed too to have been supplied with matter for thought by the visit of the morning; for she was more silent than usual, and appeared disposed to occupy herself with her own thoughts.

“*Who* did a’ say he was, that strange gentleman, the tall chap that come here yesterday with young Farland?” asked the old woman, suddenly, after a long silence.

“It was not yesterday, granny dear; it was this morning that the two gentlemen came.”

“Be it one day or t’other day, what does that matter?” returned the old woman, peevishly; “*who* did a’ say he was?”

“His name is George Fraser, granny; and he said he was born at Salem, a town in Massachusetts, in North America,” replied Bertha.

“He be’ant the gentleman as is come to lodge here, be he?” asked the old woman.

“No, granny; that is Mr. Lancaster. Mr.

Fraser is quite a different person," said little Bertha.

"And he said he come from Ameriky, did he?" asked old Hannah, musingly.

"Yes, dear. He was born there, at a place called Salem."

"Salem!" said the old woman, reprovingly; "I never heard tell of any such name as that out of church." And then she fell into a fit of musing, which gradually passed into a doze, and left Bertha at liberty first to attempt to apply herself to her drawing, and then, finding that altogether impossible, to give herself to meditation on the wonderful thing that had happened to her that morning.

CHAPTER VI.

ARTINGALE CHAPEL.

WHEN George Fraser, who had lingered behind at the cottage door for a minute or two, as has been said, rejoined young Farland on the path leading to the churchyard, the latter said that he thought he would go up to the Castle to see if he could fall in with Mr. Lancaster, as his father had desired him to ask the young architect to dine at Farlandstoke on the morrow. Mr. Farland wished to ask Sir Hildebrand also, with a view to having a little conversation on the "magnum opus," as soon as Lancaster should have seen the Castle sufficiently to form his first impressions on the subject. And Felix said that he could thus give his father's message, and kill two birds with one stone, by going up to the Castle.

“Won’t you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner also?” said Felix to his companion; “do, there’s a good fellow! I wish you would. For Sir Hildebrand and my father and the architect will be hard at work talking over their plans and all that, all the evening; and I shall have a precious dull time of it all by myself. Do come, and we shall make it out together well enough.”

“Well, thank you, yes. Curling won’t mind my leaving him once and away.”

“All right. Five o’clock. Will you come up to the Castle?” said Felix, to whom the companionship of the young American was a god-send, and who would willingly have kept him with him all the day.

“No, I think not. I have never made any acquaintance with any of them; and besides I want to go home and tell the old man that I am not going to dine with him to-morrow.”

So the young men parted, and Felix pursued his way to the Castle. But Fraser did not betake himself as immediately to Woodbine Cottage. As soon as young Farland was gone he strolled round to the south side of the Artingale chapel,—so as to place that building be-

tween him and Hannah's cottage, and between him and the path from the village across the churchyard,—intending to sit himself down on the turf in that quiet nook, to indulge in an hour's meditation on what he had just been doing under the influence of an irresistible impulse, and on the feeling which had impelled him.

On that southern side of the Artingale Chapel is the entrance to it; and Fraser saw that the door was ajar. It was so by a *laches* on the part of old Hannah, to whom was entrusted the duty of keeping the key, and doing (now, of course, by deputy) what little was needed in the way of sweeping, dusting, and cobweb removing, to keep the place in proper condition. There was a door of communication between the chapel and the chancel of the church; but it was usually kept doubly locked, the parish sexton keeping one key, and the person appointed by Sir Hildebrand to take care of the chapel the other. Hannah's deputy had that morning been disturbing the spiders in the chapel, and had by accident left the door unlocked.

Fraser entered the beautiful little building; and for a few minutes the exceeding newness to

his eye and mind of the scene that presented itself to him sufficed to distract his thoughts from the subject that was so fully occupying them.

The Artingale chapel, the burying-place of the family for many generations, was, as has been said, a very charming little bijou of Gothic architecture; and Fraser had quite enough of natural taste to appreciate the beauty of it, and enough of information respecting the "old country," and the nature of the social differences between it and his own native land, to comprehend how striking and poetized a symbolization of these differences was presented by the object and aspect of this chapel and its contents.

There were a very considerable number of memorials erected at various dates, and recording the passage of several generations of the family. But the most striking of these were four altar tombs which occupied the central position of the little building, two on the right hand, and two on the left of a person entering the chapel. Of these, the most ancient was surmounted by the recumbent statue of a solitary figure—a warrior whose crossed legs proclaimed him (not to George Fraser, but to those better versed in

such matters) to have been a crusader. On each of the other three tombs there were the statues recumbent side by side of the lord and the lady of three generations of the house of Artingale. Besides these there were two mural monuments in the taste of the seventeenth century; one to the memory of a patriarch of the house still remembered in the family and by the village chronicles as "old Sir Hildebrand;" of whom the tradition ran that he had broken his leg in the hunting-field at the age of ninety, and had lived six years afterwards, leaving behind him his widow of eighty-nine, and ten sons and daughters—all of whom were represented in alto relievo on the monument, the lady Dorothea kneeling in an uncompromisingly bolt upright position opposite to her lord, with her hands joined as in prayer in front of her, so that the fingers nearly touched the tips of Sir Hildebrand's fingers similarly extended in front of him, while five daughters all in exactly the same attitude were ranged behind her, and behind each other in gradually decreasing sizes, and five sons were similarly placed in accurately mathematical perspective behind their father. All these, down to the smallest little boy, the

buttons of whose tight-fitting jerkin and miniature little smallest of small-clothes were treated with a conscientious accuracy that was highly creditable to the artist, were adorned with huge and perfectly uniform ruffs around their necks, the cutting of which out of the solid stone must have added no trifle to the cost of the monument.

The other mural monument, which was opposite to this, was to a Doctor of Divinity, a brother of the above-mentioned old Sir Hildebrand, and consisted of a bust with huge bands, and a long Latin inscription beneath it.

When Fraser entered the chapel the rays of the sun were streaming in through the two southern windows, one on each side of the door, and were throwing into well-marked and picturesque light and shade all the infinitely numerous details of the sculpture and architecture. It was a scene such as he had never seen before ; and he was, as has been said, not insensible to all the suggestiveness of it to one of his people. And for a few moments the thoughts that the scene was calculated to awaken had power to divert his mind from those which sat so much closer to his heart, and for the indulgence of which he had come thither.

He had been invited to enter by perceiving that the door was not shut, but only closed. But when he had entered, he left it standing wide, so that from within the chapel he saw the view of the valley and the stream of the Bill with its water-meads, and the distant horizon of the blue moorland beyond. After gazing around him for awhile, he sat himself down nearly opposite to the door on the step which formed the pediment of one of the altar tombs—the oldest of them, that of the crusader of the house—and gave himself up to a reverie, in which the thoughts of his love and of the object of it were mingled with musings born of the place in which he was sitting.

“Here they lie,” he thought, “the generations of those who one after the other were the lords of all that beautiful land. Here they lived and possessed and ruled and remain to be had in remembrance. They are like a part of the country, one of the most inseparable products of it—like the oaks; they grow out of it, and are never separated from it till their dust again becomes a part of it. Little Bertha! they all call her ‘Little Bertha!’ Who were *her* fathers, and what were they doing when these marble

figures were living and ruling here at Artिंगale? No living man can tell, and no possible inquiry could discover. And my forefathers? All trace of them is still more utterly lost. Yet it is certain that their dust lies somewhere in this little island—the dust, too, of my false, wicked grandfather; would that I knew his name! Would that I knew it! Poor grandmother! Ah! these old monuments are fine things, and there is much that is grand in the meaning of them too. But a country in which such things could happen is not all right. Poor grandmother! I wonder whence Bertha got all the infinite grace of manner and elegance that is so notable in her—almost more notable than her beauty! Where from but from God Himself! That old woman, her grandmother, was the menial servant of some of these proud Artिंगales. Well, what is that to me? Bertha is—let it have come to pass as it may—not one of the servant class, but one of the ruling class; born so, made so by right divine. And being such, will she, can she, look with eyes of love on me? Thank heaven that she has no forefathers sculptured in marble on gorgeous tombs! At least there is no difference between us in that

respect. She has no roots here that need make transplantation difficult for her. But the old grandmother. She will never leave her—ought not to be asked to leave her. But the old soul is eighty. Ay! and some people of eighty live to be an hundred. And why not Hannah Campbell? Could it be possible to take her over to home? Be it all how it may, I would rather take a place under a mound in that churchyard than give up the hope of making Bertha Donne my wife! I did not dare to wait to see how she took it—the last words I said to her. Little darling, how she was shaking and trembling! Pretty little birdie, panting like a chaffinch that one holds in one's hand! But is there a hope that she should love me—a rough, ignorant, uncultivated sailor? Any way, there is nothing between her and that young squire. Nothing to fear there. I do not believe that my Bertha could love such an empty pate as that, good fellow as he is. *My Bertha!* That is a good one! Ah! there's time for that by-and-by. I wish she were here now. Oh! if she were but here! How I could tell her all my love for her! It is so difficult up there at the cottage, with that old woman sitting glower-

ing in the corner. I could not think what on earth was the matter with her, when she set eyes on me. Suppose I am like some old lover of sixty years ago. These old gentlemen in marble, they all made love in their day too. And the blue hills out there looked just the same as they do now; and the bit of a river went trickling along through the valley all the same. I wonder if Bertha will like me the less for being a sailor? She is such a timid little thing! dear, dainty little darling! Shall I set all on the hazard, and ask her at once, or wait till she knows me better? What chance have I? How do I know that she has any inclination towards me at all? How? I have no reason. I don't know. But yet—I think—I do think that I am not quite indifferent to her. What did she answer when I asked her to show me more of her drawings? No word. No single word. And yet I cannot help thinking that—that she knew that I loved her, and that it was not disagreeable to her to know it. But suppose all this should be mere delusion—the delusion of vanity and self-love? Suppose——”

But at this moment the current of the lover's meditations was cut short by the appearance of

three figures in the doorway of the chapel between him and the sunshine. They were the figures of Miss Agnes, Miss Artingale, and Mr. Lancaster. The young architect had had a rather long interview with Sir Hildebrand, and had gone over the Castle with him. He had afterwards been invited to be presented to the ladies of the family, and had been asked by them to take luncheon with them. And when the luncheon had been eaten, Miss Agnes had proposed a walk to show Mr. Lancaster something of the neighbourhood of the Castle, and of the various points of view commanded by it, and from which it was itself seen.

While Lancaster had been engaged with the baronet, Felix Farland had come to the Castle, and being told that Sir Hildebrand was with Mr. Lancaster in the uninhabited part of the building, had followed and found them there. Felix, however, very soon perceived that he could contribute nothing to the elucidation of the matters in discussion between them, and had therefore given his father's message and invitation, which was accepted by both gentlemen, and had gone his way. Otherwise, he also might have shared the invitation to lunch.

By the time when the proposal for the walk was made, Lancaster had already seen enough of the two ladies to make it very acceptable to him. He had, indeed, found that the hour spent over the luncheon-table had contrasted very favourably with the hours spent in the company of the baronet. Not that the latter was otherwise than perfectly courteous, and even good-natured. But he was pompous and dull. And Lancaster very soon perceived that he should have need of all the influence which Mr. Henningtree had told him that Mr. Farland would be found in all likelihood to exercise over the baronet on the subject of the restorations, if the work was to be brought to a happy issue. In truth, Sir Hildebrand had neither taste nor knowledge. He was unfeignedly anxious that the work should be well done; but his own notions on the subject were of the crudest, and not unfrequently, as the architect was compelled to his surprise to perceive, of the vulgarest. Sir Hildebrand was, very evidently, a gentleman in a very large and good sense of the word. And Lancaster had not yet learned that there are æsthetic vulgarities, compatible with absence of vulgarity in all other matters, which nothing

but æsthetic culture can eradicate. It was evident, in short, that it would not do to let the baronet have his own way in the restoration of his Castle. But how he was best to be prevented from having it, and led to acquiesce in the teaching of those who knew better than he, would, Lancaster judiciously thought, be better left to disclose itself after he should have had a conversation with Mr. Farland. In him Mr. Henningtree had led him to expect to find a very competent adviser.

The hours spent in listening to Sir Hildebrand's exposition of his views and intentions had not prepared Lancaster to expect the treat that awaited him, when he was invited to make the acquaintance of the ladies of the family. It was like breathing a different atmosphere. There the artist-nature of the man at once became conscious that he was in contact with kindred spirits; and the freemasonry of a community of tastes and thoughts had in an hour done more to make them friends than a year's acquaintanceship would have accomplished, had that freemasonry been wanting.

The trio had not approached the church by the path leading from Hannah's cottage, by

which Fraser had reached it, but on the other side from the village. They were in full and animated talk, and evidently in high good-humour with each other.

“What! you here, Mr. Fraser!” said Miss Agnes, as the party entered the chapel, while Lancaster started, and threw up his hands in surprise and pleasure at the rich beauty of the interior of the little building. “Ah! that accounts for the door being open. I was thinking that old Hannah would have to be scolded for negligence in leaving it unlocked. It is interesting, is it not? and must be curiously suggestive to one from the young new world of the oldness of the old country.”

“I was just thinking so, ma’am,” said the young sailor, jumping alertly to his feet, and bowing with his usual frank blitheness of manner to the two ladies; “but I cannot claim to have had any intention of coming here. I was walking this way, and came in only because I found the door open. Once in, I took my time to look about me.”

“I am glad you found the door open then, though it ought not to have been left unlocked. Mr. Lancaster—Mr. Fraser,” continued Miss

Agnes, introducing the two young men to each other ; " Mr. Fraser is from the other side of the Atlantic."

" Visiting Europe for the first time, I suppose, sir ?" said Lancaster to the young American.

" Well, sir, not that exactly ; I am a sailor by trade, and I have been often on this side in the course of my duty. But we sailors rarely see more of a country than the port we sail to."

" This time, however, you have managed to penetrate a little way into the country. For I do not think that any ships of large burthen use Billmouth as a port."

" No, they don't. Billmouth, to tell the truth, is more of a trap than a port. I should be sorry to find Billmouth under my lee, with a gale blowing from the north."

" That is, if your vessel drew more water than would allow it to enter," said Lancaster.

" I should not like it in any vessel," replied the American ; " Billmouth is a dangerous place. It has one of the worst bars I know."

" I am afraid there is no chance of an extended trade springing up between our little port and New England, if that is the best Mr. Fraser can report of us," said Miss Agnes.

“What a bijou this chapel is!” said Lancaster; “in truth, I was not prepared to find anything so exceptionally beautiful in its way. It must be one of the finest things of the kind in England.”

“I believe that it is considered so,” returned Miss Agnes.

“Do look at the view of the valley, as you see it from this side through the open door, Mr. Lancaster,” said Miss Artingale; “would not it make a charming drawing, this tomb of Sir Leonard the Crusader, the doorway, and the valley beyond, with the moorland horizon?”

“Admirable!” cried Lancaster, stepping to the spot where Mary was standing, gazing at the view from the doorway, and framing in her proposed landscape with her hands. “It would make a perfect gem without any need that the artist should sacrifice the truth of a single line to the necessities of his art.”

“I wonder whether your little neat-handed Phillis at the cottage could make a drawing of it?” said Mary, still gazing at the distance; “it would need a considerable mastery of all the mysteries of light and shade.”

“It would so,” replied Lancaster; “but I

think little Bertha would be equal to the task."

Fraser, who had meanwhile continued talking with Miss Agnes, and was now standing by her side in front of the monument of old Sir Hildebrand, pricked up his ears when the above mention of Bertha reached them. "Your neat-handed Phillis," spoken by Miss Artingale to the architect, then, was no other than *his* Bertha! And this was the man who was to live under the same roof with Bertha for months to come. Fraser looked at him with interest, but without much of mistrust. It was not in his nature to feel mistrust, or to greatly fear a rival. He could hardly be called a conceited or presumptuous man. And yet he had a sufficiently large dose of self-confidence, backed by a powerful development of the organ of hope, and a tendency to see everything *couleur de rose*, to admit with difficulty of much misgiving.

The outward appearance of the two men was as much contrasted as it was well possible for that of two men both undeniably and strikingly well-looking to be. The only feature of resemblance between them consisted of a sort of brisk, bright alertness, which seemed to indicate a

readiness to turn on at a moment's notice any given amount of energy which might be necessary for the due accomplishment of the matter in hand, whatever that might be. Fraser was much the larger man—not only taller, but much more largely framed. As his superior height made Lancaster seem less tall than he really was, so the Englishman's more lithe and slender figure made the young American appear more clumsily built than was the case. Fraser, seen with other men, was anything but a clumsily-built man. But he was heavy in appearance when contrasted with the singularly spare and sinewy form of the architect. Then Fraser was a fair man, while Lancaster was very dark—more so than is common among Englishmen. His hair was wavy, almost of the blackness of the raven's wing, and of great beauty. His eyes were black, and his eyebrows and whiskers were black, and the part of the face from which the beard was shaven was blue. The rest of the skin of his face, both cheek and forehead, was of a clear and almost perfect white. He hardly looked like an Englishman, and might have been mistaken by a stranger for an Italian, save for the evident wealth of energy which

was stored up in the man. In manner, naturally, as judged according to the English standard, and in the good gift of voice, as it chanced, he had much the advantage of the American. Purcell Lancaster had an especially sweet voice; and he inherited a correct ear and musical faculties from his forefathers, which had been well cultivated during his membership of the cathedral choir at Silchester.

“What a clever little creature she is!” said Mary Artingale, replying to Lancaster’s assertion that he thought Bertha had sufficient ability to execute the drawing that had been spoken of; “if she only had had the advantages of instruction and opportunity which others have, I really believe she would be a very excellent artist.”

“She will be a very excellent artist as it is, Miss Artingale, and despite of all disadvantages,” said Lancaster. “She will be a little longer finding her own way than if she had somebody to show it to her, that is all. And finding one’s own way has its advantages too.”

“You think she really will be able to make a living by her pencil?” asked Mary.

“Indeed, I have little doubt of it. I have been proposing to her this morning a scheme to be executed in partnership by her and me.” And then he rapidly explained to Miss Artingale his plan for the publication of a series of illustrations of the Castle. “I have already obtained the permission of Sir Hildebrand,” he added, “and the promise of his patronage.”

“I think the idea an excellent one. And you and little Bertha are to do the drawings together? I am so glad! It will be a great thing for her,” said Miss Artingale, rapidly, and flushed with the eagerness with which she spoke. “She is such a good—such a deserving little creature! She is very pretty too—don’t you think so, Mr. Lancaster?” she added, looking at him sideways from under the shadow of her bonnet.

“Yes; I think she is—yes, decidedly pretty, and very interesting-looking,” said Lancaster.

Not a word of all this had been lost on George Fraser; and upon the whole he was pleased with what he had heard. He knew it all before, he said to himself—knew it, he thought, a great deal better than Miss Artingale could know it; but, nevertheless, it was pleasant to hear her

testimony to the worth of his beloved. He was not quite so well pleased with that partnership scheme. And he saw perfectly well from Miss Artingale's manner, and the expression of her face when she had remarked to Lancaster that Bertha was very pretty, that it had occurred to her mind that it was probable the young architect might be led, during his residence under old Hannah's roof, to the conclusion that she was indeed fairer than all others in his eyes. It was just as well, therefore, to keep a bright look out towards that part of the horizon.

"Will you join us in our walk, Mr. Fraser?" said Miss Agnes, as they were about to quit the chapel, after some further conversation respecting its tenants, and the artistic and architectural beauties of the building and its contents. "I must first go up to Hannah's cottage, and tell her to take better care about the key; and then we were going to have a look at the view of the Castle from the lower part of the park, near the bank of the river. We shall be very happy if you will give us your company."

For Miss Agnes had been pleased with the young American sailor, both on the occasion of

the dinner-party at Farlandstoke, and by the conversation she had had with him while Lancaster and her niece were talking at the other end of the chapel.

Of course Fraser was delighted at the excuse for returning again to the cottage sooner than he had expected to have an opportunity of doing. Nor did he dislike the prospect of the walk with these English ladies of the upper ten thousand. Such companionship was new to him, and he was gifted by nature with the faculty of appreciating and being rapidly instructed by it.

Leaving the chapel, they turned towards the little path through the park that led to the cottage, Miss Agnes and George walking first, and Miss Artingale following with Lancaster. The conversation did not flag between either couple.

They were nearing the cottage, and had just passed round a large thorn-tree standing isolated in the park, which had previously hidden the cottage porch from their view, when they saw standing within a couple of figures, one of whom, in the next instant, passed rapidly out from it, and turning immediately towards the

back of the cottage, disappeared in the contrary direction to that which Miss Agnes and her companions were approaching.

“Who was that?” said Miss Agnes, turning round to her niece and Lancaster; “if I am not mistaken it was young Hathaway, the lawyer. What can he have been at the cottage for, I wonder?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mary; “it was Mr. Jonas Hathaway. I saw him plainly enough. He was talking to Bertha in the porch.”

And Fraser saw that a shade of displeasure or disapprobation of some sort passed over the face of Miss Agnes.

In another minute or two they were at the cottage door; but Bertha had gone into the house, and had shut the door. Fraser knocked with a stick he carried, and in a minute Bertha came to open to them.

“Who was it that left the cottage a minute ago, Bertha?” said Miss Agnes.

Bertha hung her head, and for a few seconds made no reply. Probably she would have answered the question in another second or two; but Miss Artingale answered for her,—“It was Mr. Jonas Hathaway. What did he want at

the cottage, Bertha? Was his visit to your grandmother, or to you?"

Bertha still hung her head, and was evidently embarrassed. "I think it was to both of us," she said at last.

"And what was the object of it?" asked Miss Agnes.

"Really, Miss Agnes, I hardly know. Perhaps he came kindly to ask after grandmother; his sister, Miss Lucy, often does."

"Humph! It does not seem to me to be altogether the same thing," said Miss Agnes, with a shade of severity in her manner. Mr. Jonas was not a favourite with Miss Agnes.

"But *my* object in coming here to-day," continued she, "was to speak about the door of the chapel. This is not the first time that I have found it open. Will you please tell your grandmother, Miss Donne, that the chapel must be kept shut, and the door locked."

"Yes, Miss Agnes," said Bertha, very humbly and contritely. She perceived that she was to some extent in disgrace with Miss Agnes, by her being called "Miss Donne." "I am sure," she continued, "grandmother will be very sorry. It is the negligence of Sally Benton, who is

employed by grandmother to sweep out the chapel."

"Well, Sally Benton must be told that if she neglects to lock the door when she leaves the chapel, she will lose the job of sweeping it," said Miss Agnes, somewhat more stiffly than she was usually in the habit of speaking to little Bertha. "Good morning," and Miss Agnes turned away to continue her walk.

Fraser would fain have lingered a moment for the opportunity of saying a word; but he was prevented from doing so by Miss Artingale doing the same thing, while Miss Agnes, as she turned from the cottage, said, "Come, Mr. Fraser!" and he was thus obliged to follow her.

"What did that man want here, Bertha?" whispered Miss Artingale; "you must tell me all about it. He was talking to you, and not to your grandmother in the porch. Good-bye. I shall come to hear all about it."

And then she and Lancaster followed Miss Agnes and Fraser across the park down to the side of the river.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY'S REPORT OF HER WALK.

THE latter part of Fraser's walk with Miss Agnes was less pleasant to him than the beginning of it had been. The incident at the cottage annoyed him. He had met Mr. Jonas Hathaway at dinner at Mr. Farland's, and he had not liked him. George Fraser was apt to like most people. He had liked everybody else whom he had met at the Farlandstoke dinner-party ; but he had not liked Mr. Jonas Hathaway. Not that he could have given either to himself or to anybody else any reason whatever for not liking him, beyond the sailorly one of "not liking the cut of his jib." Then he saw clearly enough that Miss Agnes, who was so much disposed to make a protégée of Bertha, did not approve of Mr. Jonas Hathaway being at the cottage.

And then, worst of all, he could not avoid seeing that Bertha had been embarrassed at the fact of their having caught Mr. Jonas in a *tête-à-tête* wit her ; that she was puzzled to give any explanation of the circumstance when questioned, and that the explanation she had attempted to give at last was an evidently frivolous one.

All this kept working in his head, and made him uneasy and unhappy ; and he fretted under his annoyance the more because it was a very new thing to him to feel unhappy or discontented with the course of sublunary matters. He was, ordinarily, one of the lightest-hearted and most buoyant of God's creatures, and this rankling trouble tormented him all the more keenly. Still, he did the best he could to make himself agreeable to his companion during the walk, forcing himself to attend to the observations intended to point out to him the special beauties and characteristics of the scenery—a task for which few were better qualified than Miss Agnes—and to reply satisfactorily to her intelligent questioning respecting his own country. Indeed, had he not done so, Miss Agnes must have had but a dull walk, for

Lancaster and Miss Artingale continued to walk a few paces behind them, and were fully occupied with their own conversation.

And so the walk continued, the *partie carrée* being thus broken up into a couple of *tête-à-têtes* till the desired point of view down in the water-meadows on the river bank had been reached, and returning thence till the two gentlemen took their leave of the two ladies at the door of the Castle.

It still wanted a couple of hours to the Castle dinner-hour; and Mary as soon as she had taken off her hat ran up to her mother's room, as was mostly her wont at that hour of the day. Mary was rarely otherwise than cheerful, but that afternoon she was in higher spirits than usual; and she entered her mother's room somewhat after the fashion, which that gentle lady used complainingly to describe as "like a high wind in a great hurry." Lady Lavinia was sitting in her easy-chair by the side of the fire, with a little table at her elbow, on which there was a plate with some calf's foot jelly, a bottle of medicine, a graduated glass, a jug containing some drink, and a tumbler. On the floor at her feet was lying open as it had fallen a

volume of Blair's sermons. For, in truth, Lady Lavinia had been sleeping; and she would have much preferred that time should have been given her by the comer whose entrance waked her to pick up the book, the position of which on the floor was such tell-tale evidence of the happiness she had been enjoying. Why she should not sleep, or why she should feel ashamed and aggrieved at being caught in *flagrante delictu* of a nap, it would be difficult to say. But Lady Lavinia resented no imputation so much as that of having been sleeping. Accordingly, what with the being suddenly waked, and what with the tell-tale position of good Dr. Blair's volume on the floor, Lady Lavinia was rather more than ordinarily peevish when Mary came up to the side of her chair.

"We have been having such a charming walk, mamma!" said Mary, in far too loud and jovial a tone for the state of her mother's nerves; "and I am come to tell you all about it."

"But that is no reason that you should come into the room like a high wind," said Lady Lavinia, in a lachrymose tone. "You startled me so that I dropped my book out of my hand."

“I am very sorry, mamma! Let me pick it up for you,” said Mary, kneeling in front of her mother, and putting Dr. Blair on the little table among the phials and glasses. “And now I must tell you all about our walk. Papa brought Mr. Lancaster—the architect, you know, who has come from Silchester to see about the restoration of the Castle—papa brought him in to lunch with us. He had been all the morning with papa going over the place and consulting. And so after luncheon Aunt Agnes asked him to walk down to the water-meads with us. And we went first to the Chancel Chapel, and found it open; and aunt was displeased at that. But in the chapel we found an American gentleman, whom we met that day that we dined at Farlandstoke; and aunt asked him to join us. And so he walked with aunt, and I walked with Mr. Lancaster; and I don’t think I ever had such a pleasant walk in my life.”

“Gently, dear, gently: do speak a little more quietly, and—and—with more repose of manner. You put me out of breath with your vehemence; and you really seem as if you were out of breath yourself. What was there so specially pleasant in a walk down in the water-

meads—very damp and sloppy they must be at this time of year.”

“Oh, no, mamma! It is a lovely day, and I assure you the water-meads were delightful. And Mr. Lancaster is such an agreeable man—so clever—and so full of information. He knows everything, I think.”

“Ah! that is the architect, you say? Mr. Henningtree's young man, isn't he? I don't think it was quite the thing for Mr. Henningtree to send his assistant to Artingale, I must say. What should I think if Hathaway were to send his young man to me, instead of coming himself?”

Mary did not seem to herself to see her way clearly, to set before her mother in their due light all the differences between the case in question and the hypothetical one to which Lady Lavinia compared it, as they appeared to her. So she contented herself with saying—

“I do not believe, mamma, that Mr. Lancaster is to undertake the restoration of the Castle as an assistant to Mr. Henningtree. He is to superintend the work himself.”

“I am rather surprised, my dear, that your aunt should think this young man a proper

escort for you in a walk. You have been accustomed to ride attended by Mr. Oblong, it is true. But then we have all known Oblong all our lives, I may say ; and that is altogether a different thing——”

“Rather so,” thought Mary ; but this was *in petto*, and therefore did not interrupt her mother’s discourse.

“However,” continued she, “I have full confidence in my sister-in-law’s judgment and sense of what is fitting.”

“If you were to see Mr. Lancaster yourself, mamma, I am quite sure that you would have no further doubt as to his being perfectly a proper person to associate with anybody.”

Mary had been on the point of saying “a more proper person to associate with than any of those whom I have ever been in the habit of seeing ;” but some feeling of some sort crossed her mind in time to induce her to substitute the milder form of testimony which she had adopted.

The doubts and objections of Lady Lavinia did not produce any great effect on Mary’s mind. Had anybody said to her, “What, Mary Artingale, have *no* regard, *no* respect for the opinion of your mother?” she would have been much

shocked; and would have been still more shocked had the question led her to examine the truthfulness of the accusation so far as to discover that in truth she had no respect for the opinion of her mother on any subject. Yet such was pretty nearly, however unconsciously, the case. Nobody at Artingale *had* any respect for Lady Lavinia's opinions. Mary had all her life been accustomed to consider her mother as a person apart, the inhabitant of a sick room—her world apart—beyond the walls of which she had not, nor could be expected to have any knowledge on any subject whatever. She was a person to be treated tenderly, soothed, amused, as far as possible, and indulged in her fancies so far as that could be done without injury to herself or others—treated like a sick child, in short. Mary accordingly said no more to her mother on the subject, and suffered what her mother had said to pass over the surface of her mind without producing the smallest lasting effect upon it.

“Do you think you shall be able to come down to dinner to-day, mamma dear?” she asked her mother.

“No, not to-day; I think Hathaway would say that it was more prudent not to go down to-day.

Indeed, he did say," continued Lady Lavinia, with a certain solemnity of manner befitting the reference to that high and dread authority, "he did say that he thought I should hardly feel equal to the exertion to-day. No; send Clarges to me, and she shall bring me here the morsel of food I need."

So Mary left her mother to dress for dinner, and employ her thoughts, as she did so, on that comparison of Mr. Lancaster with all the young men she had ever known, which had been suggested to her by her mother's doubt as to whether he was a fit person to be spoken to.

After dinner the same topic became the subject of conversation between her and her aunt. Sir Hildebrand was not a man who drank much—not so much as the generality of his contemporary country gentlemen. Nevertheless he followed the usual habit of the day in remaining a good hour in the dining-room after the ladies had left it, before joining them at the tea-table, engaged during that time, I suspect, rather in the enjoyment of a nap than in pottle-deep potations. And on the occasions—which formed the rule rather than the exception—when Lady Lavinia did not come down to dinner, this hour

was dedicated by the aunt and niece to a fire-side chat, which was deemed by both of them one of the pleasantest hours of the day.

If Mary Artingale had been deprived by the circumstances of Lady Lavinia's health and habits of life and character of the advantage of finding in her mother a guide, philosopher, and friend, such as every girl so imperatively needs to find, the want had been in Mary's case most happily and abundantly supplied by her Aunt Agnes. It had been Miss Agnes who had educated Mary, and formed her character. Miss Agnes had indeed been through life her guide, philosopher, and friend, and such in each capacity as it falls to the lot of few girls to find. And Mary's affection, respect, and reverence for her aunt were accordingly unbounded. Had Miss Agnes spoken of Mr. Lancaster in the terms Lady Lavinia had used respecting him, the effect would have been very different on Mary's mind. But then it was not on the cards, it could not be that Miss Agnes should so speak.

Miss Agnes had established herself in her accustomed seat in an easy-chair on the side of the fire looking towards the window opening on the terrace in the little morning room, which

has been already described, and which they were in the habit of using as a drawing-room also, when Lady Lavinia did not come down to dinner. And Mary had taken up a position almost as habitual to her at that particular hour of the day, and in that particular room, on a hassock footstool at her aunt's feet, with one arm thrown across her aunt's knees; the elbow of the other arm rested on her own knee, and her cheek was laid on the hand belonging to it, while she looked up fondly into her aunt's face.

"Well, Mary," said Miss Agnes, "you have not told me which of our cavaliers of this morning you liked best. Were they not curiously contrasted?"

"But, aunt, you did not give me any opportunity of judging which I liked best. You kept Mr. Fraser all to yourself the whole time."

"I might just as well say that you kept Mr. Lancaster all to yourself," rejoined her aunt, smiling; "nevertheless we both saw the two together sufficiently to be struck by the difference between them."

"Oh yes, they are most unlike. I think I am a good Englishwoman; I think I like my own countryman best."

“Of course Mr. Lancaster is by far the more cultivated man—the more civilized man, one might almost say. But I found something very charming in the utterly unaffected simplicity, the frank, open, naïve, good-humour, and eagerness to inform himself, of the young American sailor. The freshness and wax-like impressionability of his mind too, eagerly taking in new ideas at every step, was very pleasant to me.”

“Indeed, aunt, you seemed to find it so,” said Mary, looking up with pretended slyness into her aunt’s face; “you never gave Mr. Lancaster and me a chance.”

“You did not seem either of you to desire it greatly,” returned her aunt, in the same tone; “but if you had no opportunity of studying the young sailor, you certainly had plenty to form some opinion of the architect. How did you like him?”

“Very much indeed,” said Mary, with strong emphasis. “I should say,” she continued, with the slowness of one who is pronouncing a judicial opinion, “that Mr. Lancaster is decidedly the most agreeable man I ever talked to.”

“That is speaking very strongly, Mary,” replied her aunt, in a rather more serious tone;

“what was it that you found so charming in him?”

“Well, I think, aunt, it was mainly his being able to understand everything one said to him.”

“Your high admiration for such an excellence is not very flattering, I must say, for those with whom you ordinarily converse,” said her aunt.

“Well, aunt, do you find that people can understand all you say to them?—all you do say perhaps, but all you would wish to say? Do you find that you can talk to the general run of the people one sees of all the subjects that interest you, and that your own thoughts are full of? Do you, now, Aunt Agnes?” urged Mary.

“Well, my dear, perhaps I do not; and perhaps it would be too much to expect that one should find that,” said her aunt, somewhat gravely.

“Then, aunt, you can hardly wonder that I should find a man, to whom I could talk on every subject of interest with the certainty of being understood, very agreeable. And he does more than merely understand one. He takes up one’s thought when it has come to a stop and carries it on further as it were. He has always something to add of his own. On whatever subject you speak, you may be sure—at least

poor little ignorant I might be sure—that he had thought of the same thing, and had thought more and better than I. Then he always understands all one's difficulties, and knows exactly what one wants to say, when one can't altogether express it."

"Truly a very rarely gifted conversationist," said her aunt, with a tinge of grave irony in her manner; "but tell me, Mary," she continued, "what were the subjects on which you found Mr. Lancaster so well informed?"

"Oh! everything under the sun. Architecture, antiquities——"

"Put them in right alphabetical order, Mary, if we are to go through the whole encyclopædia," said her aunt, with a sort of grave quizzing that Mary did not relish—or, at least, for some reason or other, did not relish on this occasion.

"Nonsense, aunt! I was going to say scenery next, and that skips a great many letters and arts and sciences, you see. We talked of the scenery here and that around Silchester. Mr. Lancaster is an artist, not only an architectural draftsman, but a landscape painter. Then we talked of music—that ought to have come before scenery, it is true. He is very fond of music,

and knows almost all our favourite bits and authors. He had a regular musical education at Silchester——”

“Yes! he was a chorister in the cathedral,” said her aunt, a little drily.

“Yes, aunt; so he told me,” replied Mary, with all simplicity; “and he still sings when he can find somebody to accompany him. He has a tenor voice now, he told me. Would it not be delightful, aunt, to get him to take the third voice in some of Webbe’s glees, or some of our favourite bits of Haydn, or some of our own dear Jackson’s things?”

“Yes, it would be very nice, certainly,” said Miss Agnes, to whom the temptation held out was a very strong one; for the greatest pleasures remaining to her in life were supplied by music. “And you found him gentlemanlike in his manner?” said she to her niece.

“Gentlemanlike! Oh, perfectly so, of course. Would it be likely that a man so largely and variously cultivated should be otherwise than gentlemanlike?” said Mary, with a daring neologism of thought that somewhat startled her aunt.

“I don’t know, Mary,” she said; “you are

hardly aware how large and difficult a subject you are touching there. It would be wise perhaps not to pull up old landmarks till we have quite settled where we mean to set the new ones," said Miss Agnes, who, clever and thoughtful woman as she was, vented her impracticable impossibility as serenely as if what she recommended were as simple as buying a new pair of gloves before you cast off the old ones.

"I am sure you would find Mr. Lancaster a very agreeable man, aunt," said Mary, declining the field of social philosophy in favour of the concrete fact in which she was more immediately interested.

"I have no doubt that I should, dear ; indeed, the Henningtrees gave me to understand that I might expect as much."

And then Miss Agnes, "considering many things in her mind," fell into a meditation, which gradually shaded itself off into sleep, not in the least disturbed by Mary, who when her aunt had seemed disinclined for further conversation, had seated herself at the piano, and was amusing herself by going over the airs of sundry concerted pieces, for the due performance of which a masculine voice was requisite.

Miss Agnes continued to sleep, and Mary continued at the piano, till the former was awakened, and the latter interrupted by the entrance of Sir Hildebrand from the dining-room, asking for his tea.

“What! you asleep, Agnes,” he said. “I never knew you to indulge in that way.”

“Well, I don’t often, Brand,” (Sir Hildebrand, was always thus called by his sister, and by nobody else); “but this evening I enjoyed my nap very much. I heard Mary playing, though, all the time, nevertheless. I could tell you most of the things you have been playing, dear.”

“Oh! before I forget it, Agnes, has young Hathaway sent back all my papers, deeds, documents, parchments, and records—papers, deeds, documents, parchments, and records?”

The baronet had a way occasionally when he meant to be more than ordinarily impressive, of piling up a list of all the more or less synonymous words he could find in his memory to signify the subject-matter of his discourse, as in the above example; and when he had succeeded to his own satisfaction in getting together some three or four which came trippingly off the tongue, he would take so much pleasure in the

achievement that he would repeat the words sometimes three or four times.

"Yes, Brand ; I think that they have all been duly sent back. I took a note of the various papers, and have verified those returned by it. They are all right."

"And have been returned to the strong box?"

"Yes, Brand. And Oblong has got the key."

"I can't see that it was necessary to have my papers, deeds, documents, parchments, and records for the purpose at all." (Miss Agnes knew that the purpose was for the guaranteeing a sum to be lent to her brother by Mr. Farland for the restoration of the castle ; for Sir Hildebrand had no secrets from his sister.) "And I don't believe," continued he, "that Farland gave that young Hathaway any orders to ask for them. But he is such a prig of a fellow. Of course his game was to make as much botheration as possible."

"At any rate, he did not keep the papers long," said Miss Agnes.

"No ; I should hope not ; no need for them at all," grumbled the baronet. "Mary, darling, sing me 'Chevy Chase.'"

And so the evening ended at the Castle.

CHAPTER VIII.

PURCELL LANCASTER AND GEORGE FRASER.

WHEN Lancaster and George Fraser quitted Miss Agnes and Mary Artingale at the door of the Castle, they naturally turned from it together, and walked through the avenue to the park gate. And when they had remained that much in each other's company, they felt mutually inclined to prolong their walk and their talk.

"Come with me as far as Woodbine Cottage," said Fraser; "and let me make you acquainted with my old friend Captain Curling. He is one of the cleverest fellows in the world." (Lancaster was ignorant that in New England the word "clever" means "good-natured," "kind," "friendly;" and it is probable that this ignorance was a cause of some subsequent disappointment—not that

the captain was anything approaching to a fool by any means.) "You will be sure to like him. And sooner or later you must know him ; for all the world knows him and likes him hereabouts."

"Well ; I have no sort of wish that this fated meeting should be later instead of sooner. I should like the walk," said Lancaster.

"Come along, then. I didn't think, to tell the truth," continued Fraser, "that I should have liked any of your aristocrat folks so well as I like those Artingale ladies. They are real clever people."

"Yes ; I think both ladies are clever beyond what one ordinarily meets with. For my part, I never had a pleasanter walk. And you liked yours, eh ?"

"Yes, I did ; but I wasn't just easy in my mind the last part of it, or I should have liked it better," said Fraser, apparently speaking as much to himself as to his companion.

"The last part of it," said Lancaster, not a little surprised ; "then something happened to disturb you during the walk ?"

"Yes ; just so," said Fraser, meditatively. "I'll tell you what it was," he continued, after a pause of a minute or two ; "I'll tell you, for it

is a comfort to have somebody one can speak out one's thought to."

"Well, what was it?" said Lancaster, amused at the frank, schoolboy-like naïveté of the man, but inclined to like him all the better for it.

"Well, I'll tell you. Did you ever see a girl that it seemed to you quite clear, and no mistake about it, that she was the prettiest, the loveliest, and the best that God Almighty ever put the breath of life into? 'Cause if you did not, some day you will. Well, that was what I thought when I first saw that little girl that lives at the house where you live, the granddaughter of the old woman that is your landlady."

Fraser, as he said these words, looked keenly into the face of his companion to see if they produced any such effect on him as might justify the suspicion that he had a rival in the young architect. But he saw nothing of the kind. Lancaster's face betokened nothing but interested attention.

"Well," continued Fraser, "you saw what we all four of us saw, that young lawyer chap sneaking away from the house like a whipped cur when we hove in sight. You saw, or at least I did, if you did not mark it, that Bertha

hung her head and had never a word to say for herself, when the old lady from the Castle wanted to know what business that chap had there. You might have seen, too, or if you didn't I did, that the old lady was not any way pleased to see the fellow there. Now you understand why I was not comfortable all the rest of the way after we started away from the old woman's cottage. I didn't like the look of it, and I don't like the look of it, and I don't know what to think of it. I thought I could have sworn that Bertha was as good and innocent-hearted a girl as any in England."

"Well, but my dear fellow, so she may be, and yet have a lover's meeting with the young lawyer, unless, indeed, anything has passed between her and you to make it wrong in her. Why may not she feel for the lawyer all that you feel for her?"

"No; nothing has passed between us that gives me any right or claim. I can't say that," replied honest George, frankly; "but it will be bad for me—bad above a bit—if Bertha has already given her heart away. But it is worse to know that that fellow is sneaking about her. He means no good. She was ashamed to have

him seen there. The old lady from the Castle would not have looked and spoke the way she did, if she had not known that he was there for no good."

"All you can do is to have a little patience, and see a little better how the land lies. Don't be too quick to judge by appearances. I think, from the little I have already seen of her, that I would wager a heavy bet that Miss Bertha is not in the habit of having secret interviews with men for unworthy purposes. No; I feel quite sure that she is a good—a right down good girl—but the lawyer may be her sweetheart."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Fraser. Then after a few minutes' silence, he said, looking a little slyly at Lancaster, "you liked your walk, I guess. What a pretty creature she is, that girl from the Castle!"

"Yes; she is very pretty—very beautiful even; and as full of talent, wit, and brightness as she is lovely. Yes; she is a rarely gifted creature, is Miss Mary Artingale," said Lancaster, with a sigh.

"Well, what have *you* got to sigh about. I guess you had it all your own way all the walk.

You wouldn't have found her so almighty full of talent and brightness, if she hadn't a kinder notion that you was full of talent and brightness too. If you like her, what stands in your way?"

"If I liked her, what would stand in my way? If I, Purcell Lancaster, late singing-boy in the cathedral choir at Sillchester, some time articulated pupil to Mr. Henningtree, architect and surveyor of the same city, and, at this present speaking, assistant to the same gentleman, possessing no fragment of God's earth beneath the sun, nor goods, nor means of obtaining daily bread save by the sweat of my brow and of my brain—if I, being such, were to cast an eye of affection on Miss Mary Artingale, sole heiress of the name and lands of the house of Artingale, and lineal representative of a line of forefathers stretching up to times almost beyond the ken of history—if I, Purcell, were to love her, Mary, what would stand in my way? And that is what you ask of me, is it?" said Lancaster, who, while thus speaking, had paused in his walk, and faced round so as to stand immediately in front of his companion, moved, as it would seem, to assume that position by the

serious and almost bitter earnestness with which he spoke.

"Yes; that is what I asked," said Fraser, "speaking as any one of my countrymen would speak. Now do you answer me, speaking as one of your people would speak."

"Well, this would stand in my way," answered Lancaster, resuming his walk with a quick, impatient stride—"this, among other things: that, in the first place, the lady in question herself would not unreasonably deem me the most monstrously and absurdly presumptuous coxcomb and fool that ever stepped the earth; that, in the next place, I should be driven forth from the very advantageous work that has been proposed to me here, as if I were a noxious reptile that had crept unawares into their home; that, besides all this, I should be held to have discredited the recommendation of my best and kindest friend, Mr. Henningtree, and to have exposed him to blame and much trouble; and that, finally, I should have ruined the prospects of my own career, and made that earning of my bread by the sweat of my brow and my brain that I spoke of infinitely more difficult, if not impossible. These are some of

the things that would stand in my way. Stand in my way! Why I believe those old Artin-gales that we were looking at just now, cut in marble on their tombstones, would rise from them to stand with their marble obstruction in my way."

Fraser made no immediate reply; and the two young men walked on for some paces in silence.

"And they would not any of them say," remarked Fraser, suddenly breaking the silence, "that you were not an honest man, industrious in your business, understanding it well, and capable of earning bread by it for your wife and children?"

"No; I don't suppose they would say anything of all that. I flatter myself nobody could say that of me. But it would not need to say any of those things to show quite sufficiently that I was a puppy that deserved to be whipped for my impertinence."

"Well," said Fraser again, with a sigh, and after another long pause, "this is a wonderful old country; and I suppose it is fixed the way you English people like to have it. I shouldn't like it. The old lady from the Castle

yonder—a nice pleasant old lady she is—was showing me them old Artingales lying on their tombstones in marble, and was a-saying that we on our side of the water had got nothing any ways like that. ‘No, indeed, ma’am,’ says I, ‘we have not; and what is more, we don’t seem yet to be a-beginning to make any preparation for the possibility of ever having the like of it by-and-by.’ And I did a kinder feel that there was something beautiful about it which our people at home never so much as get a taste of. And I felt a bit sorry for the moment, to think that we had cut the painter for good and all, and set ourselves all adrift from the old ship, and unhitched ourselves like from off the chain that hangs all your country up to a hook fixed somewhat t’other side of creation. I did so—for a moment. But——” and the young American paused, and shook his head.

“For all that,” said Lancaster, with rather a sad smile, “I should not altogether like to feel myself unhitched from my little place on the chain that we old-world folks all hang by from the hook on the further side of creation.”

“I suppose not,” said Fraser, in a half-absent

way, as if his thoughts were busy with something else. "But it don't answer," continued he, after a silence of some minutes; "look here now, Mr Lancaster, that old chapel, with the tombs of the family, and the statues, and all of it, was very pretty, and put kinder poet-like thoughts into one's head. But see what comes of having your grandfathers cut out in marble, and stored up in that way from generation to generation. It isn't always that young fellows, such as it might be you, fall in love with girls, such as it might be Miss Artingale. Sometimes it is young fellows, such as might be Sir Hildebrand's son, say, if he had one, who fall in love with girls, such as might be, say, Miss Bertha there at the cottage. And it is apt to happen that the shades of the old gentlemen cut in marble are kept quiet in their graves in another way."

"How do you mean?" said Lancaster; "what other way?"

"Why, look here now," pursued Fraser; "you are thinking, likely, what can I know about it, hailing as I do from Salem, over the Atlantic yonder. I'll tell you. Once upon a time there was a poor Scotch lass, one of the

prettiest girls in all the country, and as good as gold. Well, a grand gentleman, such as one of them cut in marble, sees her, and falls in love with her, and either marries her, or makes pretence to marry her, soon gets tired of her, wants to marry a woman of his own sort, and ships the poor Scotch girl, with her child, off to America. Well, that poor Scotch girl was my grandmother, and her child was my father. If he—my grandfather, whoever he was—had not had his forefathers cut in marble, or something of such like, he would not have been ashamed of marrying my grandmother.”

“But, my dear fellow,” said Lancaster, much struck by his new friend’s story, “you cannot suppose that such cases are frequent. On the contrary, such a story is a very extraordinary one. Believe me, Englishmen generally, not even those who have a whole line of ancestors cut in marble, play tricks of that sort.”

“Any way, that was what happened to my grandmother,” rejoined Fraser; “and, except for the wrong that was done to her, I should be quite as well pleased that all happened as it did; for I am quite content with my lot; and,

to tell you the truth, if you won't be offended, with my own side of the herring-pond."

"But your grandmother is still alive; and she must know the name of the man who so scandalously treated her?" said Lancaster.

"Yes! she is alive, and well, thank heaven! and her memory is as bright as when she was five-and-twenty. And she knows well enough the name of the scoundrel who deceived her. But she never would tell it either to my father or me. This I am sure of, that it was not Fraser."

"Then you think Fraser is not your real name?" questioned Lancaster.

"A man's real name with us is what he chooses to call himself," said Fraser; "but that was certainly not the name of the man who deceived my grandmother so cruelly; and I am pretty sure that it was not her own maiden name. However that may be, the old woman has been always called Fraser, from ever since she first settled at Marble Head, in Massachusetts; and my father was known as George Fraser; and so am I."

"And what do you suppose to be your grandmother's motive in refusing ever to tell you or

your father the name of his father?" inquired Lancaster.

"Oh, that's clear enough, her motive," said Fraser; "if only my father or I could have any way got at his name, we should have been on his track as sure as a trapper tracks a 'possum. We should have found the way to make him do right by the poor woman whose heart he broke—the scoundrel—because she was not grand enough for his ancestors—with their statues cut in marble on their tombstones. And, poor old soul! she was afraid that more trouble than good would come of it. And she felt a kinder shy and unwilling to have the bygones of the matter waked up again anyhow."

"But your grandmother, from what I gather from you, was not certain whether she had been really married or not?" inquired Lancaster, with increasing interest.

"No; she never knew. Of course she supposed that she was being married. Some marriage ceremony of some sort was performed. Then they told her, and half made her believe, I think, that it had been all a cheat, and that she was no wife at all; and so they shipped her off to America out of the way."

“Do you know where it was that the ceremony of marriage, real or pretended, took place?” asked Lancaster.

“Somewhere in Scotland. That is all I or my father ever knew. She was a Scotch girl, my grandmother,” replied George.

“Ay; I supposed it had been in Scotland,” said Lancaster; “the law about marriages is different there from England, and it is much easier, I believe, to play fast and loose. Do you know what your grandmother’s real belief about the matter continued to be?”

“I think that she always has believed, and believes to this day, that she was really and truly married. But they pretty well talked her out of it, by what I can make out; and persuaded her any way, that there was no hope of right or justice for her, and that nothing was left for her but to do as she was bid; and that was to go aboard of a ship and sail for America. Now do you understand what I think about it, when I stand in yonder chapel, and look at all those tombs, and the family pride which made them, and which they make?”

“Yes, my dear fellow; I think I can understand that now. But,” continued Lancaster,

musingly, "it is just as likely as not that you yourself are the rightful representative of some old English family, and the rightful heir to some old English estate. Your father was your grandmother's only son, was he not?"

"Of course he was."

"And you, as I gather, were the only son of your father?"

"Not a doubt about that."

"And suppose, after all, that the marriage in Scotland was a real and lawful marriage. You would be in that case the only real and lawful heir of the man who deceived your grandmother."

"Thank you; but I think I would rather not be the lawful heir of such a blackguard," said Fraser, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, but my dear fellow, you *are* his grandson, any way," said Lancaster, smiling; "and you might as well take the good as the bad of the heritage—if any good there were."

"Well, I think what I should best like would be never to hear anything more about it. It has been a sad thing to me, and was worse to my father before me to see the way in which that poor old woman's heart was broken; and I hate to think about the matter at all. We never

“speak of it at home. I am an American citizen now ; and I can’t say that I want to be anything else. I should not have told you the story now, but that first I was set a-thinking of it by that chapel there, and then by what you said of yourself and the daughter of all those gents in marble. Don’t let us say anything more about it.”

“Only this one word,” said Lancaster ; “did your grandmother ever say anything to lead you to guess what part of the country your grandfather belonged to ; whether he was a Scotchman, or from the north of England, or the south ?”

“I feel pretty sure that he was an Englishman, and not a Scotchman ; but that is all that I can say on the subject. We have years ago ceased to tease my grandmother by alluding to the matter in any way.”

“And does anybody else know the particulars of the story ?” asked Lancaster.

“Old Captain Curling knows just as much as I have told you, nothing more. He heard it all years ago from my father.”

And then nothing further was said between the young men upon the subject. They con-

tinued to chat, however, upon a variety of subjects during the remainder of their walk ; and when it came to its end a very considerable intimacy had sprung up between them, and each felt cordially well inclined to like the other.

CHAPTER IX.

A DRAWING LESSON.

LANCASTER, after saying good-bye to his new friend at the door of Woodbine Cottage, strolled slowly back to his own lodging in a thoughtful mood. What a bright-hearted, vigorous nature had this young American drawn from the free social atmosphere and the fresh elements of his young country! What a fine fellow he was! What should stand between him, Purcell, and Miss Mary Artingale, quotha? How glorious to fancy, even for a moment, that there was nothing that need stand in the way, if only they mutually wished that nothing should so stand! And Lancaster was for a moment tempted to envy his new friend the mental stand-point from which such a view of the world and its ways was possible.

But the reflection of the next moment warned him that this was dangerous, or at all events unprofitable ground for his meditations to stray over; and he forcibly wrenched his thoughts away from it, and compelled them to turn themselves in another direction. They recurred to the strange story Fraser had told him, and upon that they continued to work till he reached the door of old Hannah's cottage. He was quite absorbed by the meditation into which he had fallen on the subject when he reached the cottage, and remained standing in the porch for a few minutes, still ruminating before he put his hand on the latch of the door.

Bertha had seen him from the window, and came to open it.

"It is dinner-time, is it not, Miss Donne?" said Purcell, smiling.

"Indeed it is; but I suppose you are not ready for your dinner, or have forgotten all about it; for I saw you standing in the porch ever so long, thinking of anything, I should say, but dinner."

"True enough, Miss Donne, that I was not thinking of dinner; but I am ready for it all the same. And then afterwards, if you like, we

will go to work together. You shall show me your drawings, and perhaps I may be able to give you a hint or two. I have been at it longer than you, you know, and have had the advantage of good teaching. And then I want to begin to settle some of the subjects for our work, you know ; have you been thinking about it?"

"Oh, so much! If only I could think that I should be able to succeed in such a bold attempt. And how thankful I should be, Mr. Lancaster, for your instruction! It is so kind of you. I have hardly ever had any teaching at all. And I have so terribly wanted it."

It will be seen that timid little Bertha had learned in a wonderful degree already not to be afraid of Purcell Lancaster, and to treat him as a friend. Nevertheless she was half frightened at her own volubility. She had hardly ever spoken so many words together in her life before. But it was impossible for the shyest or most timid to be timid or shy with Purcell Lancaster. It was a way he had got, that infallibly put such persons at their ease with him.

"As for succeeding," he said, beginning to eat his dinner as he spoke, "I have not a shadow of doubt about it. When people are really

determined to succeed they mostly do succeed. But we must work hard and help each other all we can. I shall be delighted to give you all the help I can, and you will make the undertaking possible to me, by doing much of the drawing on the spot, which I should not have the time for. It will be a capital partnership, for neither of us would be able to do without the other."

"I can hardly hope to believe that, Mr. Lancaster," said Bertha, blushing with pleasure.

"It is absolutely true, though. I do not mean to say that I could not make the drawings. But I could not do so, and do justice to my work at the Castle at the same time. I should have begun my measurements this afternoon if Miss Agnes Artingale had not asked me to walk down into the meadows with her to look at the Castle from thence."

"You must have had a very nice walk. They are such good, kind people," said Bertha.

"They seem very much so, indeed," said Purcell, colouring as he said so, from some thought of his own, for there was clearly nothing in the words spoken to make him blush. "I suppose you see them frequently," he added,

yielding to the temptation to induce his companion to say more on the subject, while angry with himself for yielding.

“Oh yes, very often. They have also been so kind to me, and so good to grandmother. We live, you know, on a pension from the family,” said Bertha, simply.

This was not the department of the subject which had most interest for Purcell; and he could not refrain from trying again.

“I suppose they are much liked in the neighbourhood?” he said, in an indifferent tone, as he continued to eat his dinner.

“Indeed, by everybody, rich and poor. The baronet, Sir Hildebrand, is very much respected. He is a very good landlord, I believe. But it is the ladies of the family that are best known to the poor—Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale, that is, for nobody hardly ever sees Lady Lavinia, she is such an invalid. But Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale are worshipped by all the neighbourhood.”

“And which is the favourite?” said Purcell, determined now he had said so much not to be baulked of what he wanted to hear.

“Well, I hardly know. Miss Agnes is very

good—nobody in trouble ever went to her in vain. But people are perhaps a little afraid of her. But Miss Mary—Miss Artingale, that is—there is not a man, woman, or child about the place that would not go through fire and water for her. I remember last year, when she got a fall from her horse down in the water-meadow yonder, near where you were this morning—she was jumping over a brook, and her horse, I was told, put his foot into a hole, and fell with her, and Mr. Decimus Oblong was well nigh frightened out of his wits, poor old man!—the whole neighbourhood was pretty nearly as much scared as he. There was such racing and running; and I do believe that half the country side went up to the Castle that evening to know whether Miss Mary was hurt or not.”

“She told me of that fall when we were near the spot this afternoon,” said Purcell, feeling that he was guilty of vain boasting in repeating the fact even to little Bertha.

“But she did not tell you how anxious all the people were about her, I’ll be bound,” said Bertha.

“No; not a word of that. She laughed, and said that Mr. Oblong was more frightened

than she was ; but that it might have been a bad fall."

"She rides, they say, better than any other lady in all the north of Sillshire ; and I can tell you it is a pretty sight to see her on horseback," said little Bertha.

"And who does she ride with?" asked Purcell.

"She used always to ride with old Mr. Decimus Oblong, the old steward, and does so still, sometimes. But since young Mr. Farland has come home she often goes out with the old gentleman and his son. Of course that is pleasanter for her than always riding with old Mr. Oblong, who is getting almost too old for the saddle."

"So now she rides with Mr. Farland and his son?"

"Yes. Old Mr. Farland was always a great rider."

"But you say Miss Artingale has only taken to riding with him since his son came home?"

"I never saw her riding with old Mr. Farland before. But that is natural enough, you know," added little Bertha, with an arch smile, which nobody who had only seen her with strangers would have thought her capable of.

"Of course, very natural," acquiesced Purcell.

"They say—everybody says—that Miss Mary and young Mr. Farland are to make a match of it."

"Oh! Mr. Felix Farland is to marry Miss Artingale, is he?" said Purcell, looking very busily down into his plate.

"So they say. Of course I know nothing about it," said little Bertha; "but that would be very natural too, would it not? The two properties join, you know. Both are only children, and both such old, old families—older than the hills, I believe."

"Oh, very natural. Nothing could be more natural. Mr. Felix must be just the man, I should say, for such a very clever girl as Miss Artingale," said Purcell, with a slight tone of bitterness in his voice, which Bertha's fine ear did not fail to notice, and which she attributed to some dislike between Mr. Lancaster and young Farland.

"Mr. Felix is a very excellent and good-hearted gentleman, and I should think would make any lady a good husband," said Bertha, staunch in her gratitude to Felix for the pur-

chase of the picture. "But is Miss Artingale so very clever?" she asked, in all the simplicity of *bonâ fide* curiosity.

"Did not you tell me she was, when you were speaking of her just now?" said Lancaster.

"No. I did not say anything about her cleverness. I dare say she is—I am sure she must be," said little Bertha, who would not for the world have been thought to insinuate anything in derogation of the perfections of her much-loved Miss Mary; "but I did not say anything about it, because, you know, Mr. Lancaster, I can be no judge whether she is clever or not. But no doubt you found out for yourself that she is clever in the course of your walk."

Poor little Bertha spoke this with utter singleness and guilelessness of heart. But Purcell suspected a little touch of raillery; and he was a little bit provoked and made uncomfortable—unreasonably enough. But the little feeling of scratchiness prompted him to pay Bertha off in kind, as he thought, by alluding to the incident of the morning, when Mr. Jonas Hathaway was seen escaping from the cottage.

He had fully intended to ask her about it in any case. So he said, not making his attack very skilfully—

“I suppose you found out as much for yourself, Miss Donne, before now, respecting a certain young lawyer, who visits occasionally at the cottage, it seems.”

“Oh, Mr. Lancaster, do not speak in that way. I am sure you would not if you knew how it distresses and pains me,” said Bertha, with an accent of real suffering, which caused Purcell to look up from his plate with sudden surprise, and to change his tone immediately. When he raised his eyes to her face he saw that not only was she crimson, but that the tears were standing in her eyes; and she was very evidently seriously moved and distressed.

“My dear Miss Donne, I am so sorry if I have grieved you. Pray forgive me! I had no idea that there was anything in the circumstance that could—could—distress you to refer to,” he said, feeling not a little surprised and perplexed himself at the effect he had produced on her.

“It is not your referring to—to—the circumstance,” said Bertha, almost sobbing, “but

the circumstance itself that distresses me ; only please don't think or speak as if—as if there was—as if you thought there was—anything between me and Mr. Jonas. He never came to the cottage before in his life.”

“ But, Miss Donne,” said Lancaster, gravely, “ if Mr. Hathaway's visits are disagreeable to you, there cannot be any difficulty in taking care that you are not troubled by them. I think I know one friend of yours—a very true one, though a new one—who would be only too happy to be charged with such a duty by you,” added Purcell, thinking that he could do no harm by putting in a word for his young American friend.

Bertha blushed and turned away her face for a minute before answering him.

“ His visits are very—very disagreeable to me—and he will come again—he said he should ; but I cannot, I dare not, take any such steps as you speak of to prevent them,” she said, wringing her little hands in her trouble.

“ But, Miss Donne,” said Lancaster, still more gravely, “ forgive me if I point out to you that it is very important to you that such visits—clandestinely paid—*should* be discontinued. Did

you not observe this morning that your kind friend Miss Agnes Artingale was vexed and displeased at what she had seen. In any case it cannot be proper for a young man to be haunting the cottage, and attempting to get away without being seen when anybody is coming."

"I know it, I know it. Oh, Mr. Lancaster, don't think that I don't know it. It is that that distresses me so. What must Miss Agnes think, and Miss Mary too, and—and—and—other people too?" sobbed poor little Bertha, fairly breaking down, and bursting into tears.

Lancaster's first thought was, "Fraser's all right, lucky dog, if he really wishes to make this little girl his wife." But he said—

"Well, then, Miss Donne, since you feel so strongly the great evil of leaving these visits unexplained and unprevented—and I cannot conceal from you that I think you are right in so feeling—why not at once at least say openly how, why, and for what motives Mr. Hathaway was here, and is likely to come here again."

"But that is what I cannot, dare not, do. Mr. Jonas charged me, and indeed made me solemnly promise not to tell anybody the business on which he came here."

“Miss Donne,” said Lancaster, more and more surprised and perplexed, and not speaking till after a short period of consideration, “it is my serious advice to you to disregard any such promise. It was evidently not freely given. It was given under moral constraint. It was a very improper promise to ask for, and an improper promise to be given. I counsel you not to adhere to it. I do not like secrets, such secrets especially. They are very dangerous things—above all, forgive me for saying so—to young persons in your position. See the mischief that this secrecy has done to you already. Trust me, if it is adhered to, it will do more mischief yet.”

“I know it, I know it, and I knew it before,” cried Bertha, breaking out into weeping anew. “Oh, Mr. Lancaster,” she went on, “believe me, nobody can hate anything of the sort more than I do. But what can I do? I dare not break my promise; Mr. Hathaway threatened me so! I do not think that he is a good man,—that is,” she hurried to add, “not that I mean that there was any harm at all, as far as I can see, in what he came here about. He only wanted to ask some questions of grandmother, or arther to get

me to ask grandmother, for he seemed to think that she would not answer him. But he said—When I say that he is not a good man, I mean that I think if he was angry with anybody he would not easily forgive them, and would be likely to do them harm. Perhaps I ought not to have told you even so much as I have told you, Mr. Lancaster. But you will not repeat it to anybody, will you?”

But Lancaster was thinking, and did not reply to her immediately.

“Pray promise me that you will not repeat to anybody what I have said. I did so want to tell you the truth, at least—at least so far as to make you understand that—that—that there never was or could be any—any intimacy or indeed even friendship between me and Mr. Jonas Hathaway. You might at least tell that to—to—to anybody who thought the contrary.”

Lancaster perfectly well understood who the person was to whom little Bertha was specially anxious that the above assurance should be conveyed, and he determined that he would at least put matters right for her—as far as his testimony could do so—in that quarter.

“Well, Miss Donne,” he said, after a while,

"it is very mysterious. I fear that I am too recent a friend to venture on urging you further. You must judge for yourself. Still, my strong advice to you is, not to keep any secret of Mr. Jonas Hathaway's. If I were you, I would tell all about it to Miss Agnes, and leave it to her judgment to keep it secret herself or not."

Little Bertha shook her head. "I cannot, I dare not do it. You don't know, Mr. Lancaster. Of all people I could not tell Miss Agnes, or any of the people at the Castle."

"Well," said Lancaster, shrugging his shoulders, "it is quite clear that I can neither make nor meddle in the matter. All I can say is, think over the advice I gave you just now. You may tell Mr. Hathaway, if you like, that I gave you that advice. And now let us get out the drawing things and go to work. Work is the best cure for all troubles."

So the drawing things were got out, and they sat down together side by side at the little table; and Lancaster began to point out certain corrections in a drawing of the Castle from the point of view in the water-meads, where he had been that morning.

It seemed, however, as if he were little in-

clined to follow his own precept very steadily ; for laying down his pencil after a while, he said, evidently giving vent to thoughts which were occupying his mind more than the drawing lesson, " Your grandmother, I think I have been told, lived in the service of the Artingale family ?"

" Yes ; she lived with them many years. She was housekeeper for a long time. She lives on a pension left her by the late Sir George Artingale — we have nothing else to depend on."

" Sir George ?—George. He was the father of the present baronet, then ?"

" Yes ; Sir George was the last baronet. I have heard that they were most of them Georges or Hildebrands."

" And your grandmother lived a long time with the family ?"

" Yes ; many years. She was housekeeper for Sir George before his marriage ; for I have often heard her speak of the first coming here of the late Lady Artingale, Sir George's wife."

" Ah ! she lived in his service before he was married ?"

" Oh, yes ; several years, I fancy."

And then the drawing lesson went on again. But it did not seem as if the teacher's heart was in it, as much as it was his wont to put his heart into his work. For while Bertha was making some corrections in her drawing he remained apparently in a brown study, amusing himself absently with his pencil and a fragment of drawing paper.

Presently he said to Bertha suddenly, putting the little scrap of paper before her, "did you ever see anything like either of those before, Miss Donne?"

There were two heads, drawn in a very masterly manner on the paper, side by side.

"To be sure I have," she said, immediately, looking round at him with startled surprise; "there is no mistaking either of them. I knew them directly. This is the likeness of Mr. Fraser; and that is the likeness—wonderfully exact—of the statue of old Sir Hildebrand in the Artingale chapel."

"Yes; those were the originals for which the drawings were meant. I think they are tolerably like. Does anything else strike you in them?"

"To be sure there does," said Bertha, looking

round into his face, and nodding her head. "I see it. They are wonderfully alike. That is what you mean, is it not?"

"Yes; that is what I mean. There is the head of a living man of eight-and-twenty or so, and there is the head of the marble statue of an old man of ninety or more. And yet they are strikingly alike. The fact is that the lines, the framework of the face is the same."

"How singular; but how admirably you have drawn them, and in such a minute, too. Don't throw them away. May I have them?"

"I am not going to throw them away. And some day, if you have any value for them, I will give them to you; but I do not want to part with them just at present."

Bertha looked up at him timidly, and blushing at the refusal, and at the fear that he would guess why she wished to possess the drawing.

"I beg pardon," she said; "it was very bold in me to ask you such a thing. But I fancied you set no value on what you seemed to have done so carelessly."

"I did them very carefully," said Lancaster; 'but there is no cause to beg pardon. I promise

that you shall have the bit of paper one of these days. Only I want it now. It would be odd if fellow-workers could not ask each other such things as that. Come, let us attend to our work."

CHAPTER X.

SIR HILDEBRAND'S GRAND GALLERY.

THE next day Lancaster was up betimes, and up at the Castle at work. He meant to have a long and busy day at it; for he was to dine, together with Sir Hildebrand, at Farlandstoke, mainly for the purpose of talking over plans with Mr. Farland, and he was anxious to have some ideas ready to submit to him, or at least to have made himself sufficiently well acquainted with the localities and their condition to be able to understand and appreciate such as Mr. Farland might himself bring forward. He worked away merrily, testing, examining, measuring, and making notes till it was near breakfast-time; and he was thinking of running home down to the cottage to get his breakfast, when a servant came to the little improvised workshop, which

has been described, with Sir Hildebrand's compliments, and would Mr. Lancaster come in and breakfast with them at nine—it would save the time of going down the hill and coming up again from the cottage; and Sir Hildebrand would be glad of the opportunity of hearing from Mr. Lancaster the result of his examination of the chapel roof.

Of course Mr. Lancaster sent back his compliments and thanks, looked at his watch, and was in the breakfast-room punctually by nine. He found Sir Hildebrand standing on the hearth-rug, watch in hand.

“Good morning, Mr. Lancaster. You were at work early this morning. Ready for your breakfast, eh? That's right; and then we can—oh! here comes Mary; good morning, dear. You are improving; it is only one minute after nine. Well done. Nothing like punctuality, Mr. Lancaster.”

Mary shook hands cordially with Lancaster, and blushed “celestial rosy red” as she did so, perhaps from some consciousness that her punctuality on that occasion did not deserve all her father's praises. She had a sketch-book and pencils in her hand.

"It was easy to be punctual this morning, papa," she said, "for I have been up some time. The mornings are getting so lovely now that I have been tempted to take out my sketch-book, and try to begin a study of trees in the park. And I thought that perhaps Mr. Lancaster would let me show him my attempt."

"If I can be of the smallest service," said Lancaster, bowing, and colouring as he did so, and then colouring more deeply with vexation at consciousness of the absurdity of his doing so.

"Oh! that is what the sketch-book is brought out for, after being thrown by for more than a year past. Mary wants to get a drawing-master's work out of you, Lancaster. But you must not let her bother you or take up too much of your time."

"Well, I won't deny, Mr. Lancaster, since papa accuses me of it in such a point-blank manner, that I have partly been tempted to take up my drawing again by the hope that you might kindly give me a little help. But I will promise to be discreet, and you must tell me if I bother you."

"It will be a great pleasure to me if I can be

of any use to you, Miss Artingale. May I look?" he added, stretching out his hand for the book.

He had spoken in a manner that showed how truly it would be a pleasure to him—rather more emphatically than was necessary for the occasion, and more clearly than was, perhaps, quite discreet. Sir Hildebrand, however, was not a man to take note of any such manifestation, or to comprehend the possible meaning of it if he had. Neither, I suppose, was Miss Artingale struck with anything of impropriety in his manner, nor did she probably give a moment's thought to what it might mean or not mean. But she clearly was pleased by what he said, and showed that she was so by the look she gave him in return.

"——feet in hot water directly, and go to bed, and I will see her in the course of the morning," Miss Agnes's voice was heard saying, as she crossed the hall. The same moment she entered the room with a quick, bustling step, and a little basket full of keys in one hand, and a volume in the other, and rushed rather than stepped to the head of the table where the tea-urn was.

"How many minutes late, Brand? not five,

I am sure. Good morning, everybody. How do you do, Mr. Lancaster? Glad to see you. Mary Dunnet sends to say she is ill. So you were out this morning, Mary? Sketching, eh?" with a quick glance at Mary, and then another from under her eyelids at Lancaster. "That's a new whim, is not it, or an old one come back again?"

"I was tempted by the hope of profiting by Mr. Lancaster's assistance and advice," said Mary, taking the bull by the horns; "it is quite impossible," she added, turning to him, "to get any instruction here, if one had the best will in the world to profit by it. But, partly, my emulation has been excited by little Bertha's doings. I could draw better than she two years ago; but she beats me out of the field now."

"Miss Donne has very considerable artistic talent, indeed, a real vocation for the profession, one may say," said Lancaster; "I doubt not that she will become a very clever artist."

"She is a clever little body altogether," said Mary. "Don't you think that we did very well for you, Mr. Lancaster—or at least that aunt did, for it was her idea—in putting you into a lodging with such a neat-handed Phillis?"

"Indeed, I think so; and I assure you I am grateful accordingly," said Lancaster.

"And she is a good little girl as can be," said Miss Agnes; "at least I always thought her so. By-the-by, Mary dear, what an odd thing it was that Mr. Hathaway being there, and sneaking off in that queer way, and Bertha's evident confusion and embarrassment afterwards. I do not know what to make of it. Did you not observe it, Mr. Lancaster?"

"I certainly did, Miss Agnes; and, indeed, ventured to speak to her about it last night."

"Well; and what did she say?" demanded Miss Agnes.

"Very little; and what the explanation of his being there, and going away as he did may be, I cannot guess. But I think I can say, without any fear of being mistaken, that his visit was neither expected by nor acceptable to Miss Donne."

"So much the better, as far as that goes; but it is very strange," said Miss Agnes.

"Possibly," said Mary, "old Hannah may have got into some money trouble—some debt in Billiford; and Mr. Jonas may have been em-

ployed to 'recover'—that is the proper phrase, I believe, for dunning for it."

"If Hannah is behindhand a few pounds, we must put it right for her," said Sir Hildebrand; "tell Oblong to see to it."

Lancaster was able to form a pretty shrewd guess that Mr. Oblong would not be able to "put the matter right;" but he judged it best to say no more upon the subject.

Presently, when the breakfast was over, Sir Hildebrand said, "Now, Mr. Lancaster, if you are at leisure, I should like to go over the north rooms behind the great staircase with you; I have an idea of my own about those rooms" (Lancaster groaned inwardly in spirit at the prospect of losing the morning in listening to the heavy baronet's talk)—"and, Agnes," he went on, "if you don't mind coming with us, I should like to show you what I have been thinking of."

Lancaster could not abstain from glancing at Miss Artingale; and the baronet's proposal seemed not to be altogether so distasteful to him. Mary was detected by Lancaster in the act of shyly looking up at him at the same moment; and her eyes dropped to the floor on the instant. She said no word as to her father's invitation,

which in truth had not included her ; but when her aunt prepared to follow Sir Hildebrand to the uninhabited part of the castle, Mary, with her sketch-book in her hand, came with her, as naturally as a filly trots by the side of its mother.

So they went up to the northern suite of rooms on the first floor, which extended behind the great staircase along the whole of that front of the central part of the Castle. Now the baronet had conceived the notion of throwing these four or five rooms into a long gallery, which would indeed have made a very handsome gallery, but which, placed in that position, would have been but little available for either beauty or convenience, considered with reference to the other parts of the house. And Lancaster had already conceived a bolder idea, which would, he thought, involve a material improvement in the general distribution and arrangement of the building. His idea was to throw back the great staircase towards the back or northern side of the house, thus cutting in half the space which Sir Hildebrand had purposed devoting to his long gallery, but obtaining room for a similar, or somewhat more

spacious gallery on the southern side. The stair would be thus improved; a gallery on the southern side would be in immediate communication with the other grand apartments, would be to the south instead of to the north, and would overlook the grand terrace, the slopes of the park, and the lovely view beyond. The fact was, as I believe has been mentioned before, that the great terrace had formed no part of the original plan or structure of the Castle, but had been added during the period of the Stuarts, when the Italian taste was beginning to prevail in England. The façade of the building looking over this terrace was now evidently the best and choicest part of the house as regarded position; and Lancaster felt that it was a great pity that it should be cut up and sacrificed by the space required for the great staircase, as was the case at present.

It was a very bold idea, that of thrusting so important a feature of the entire building as the main staircase into a new position. But the young architect had satisfied himself that it might be done; and that taking into consideration the cost of the restorations of the staircase which were absolutely necessary, and adding

thereto the cost of the re-adaptation of the northern suite of rooms, which were the most dilapidated, and had been the longest abandoned of the whole Castle, the increased expense would not be comparatively very heavy. The staircase itself would be much improved, and the entire southern front would be available for a suite of rooms such as would have few equals in England.

Lancaster had been seized by this idea on his first general survey of the Castle. He had thought of it much since, and it had now become a very pet project with him. A restoration of the Castle without this great improvement would have seemed to him an utter failure. Projectors, improvers, and architects will sympathize with him. They will sympathize also with his dismay when Sir Hildebrand announced that he had projects of his own with regard to the north rooms.

“The arrangement, restoration, distribution, and disposition of the north rooms, Mr. Lancaster,” said the baronet, as he led the way from the inhabited wing of the Castle to the dismantled part of the vast pile—“the arrangement, restoration, distribution, and disposition of that

part of the Castle, I say, will be one of the great problems we have to solve. It will no doubt have occurred to you that it is so. And the consideration will cost you many hours of anxious thought—or would have done so—would have done so if I had not, by a happy flash of inspiration, hit upon the solution of it.” And the baronet stopped short, and faced round upon the little party following him. “My idea is a bold one, perhaps you will call it an audacious one; but I think you will admit, and I think my friend Farland will admit, that it is a happy one—a happy and felicitous one—happy and felicitous.”

Lancaster sighed, and followed with resignation as the baronet led the way to the northern rooms.

“Now here we have five rooms *en suite*, all of them in such a condition that they need extensive and substantial repairs. Why not throw them into one room—a magnificent gallery—family portraits, and that sort of thing? Do you catch the idea, Mr. Lancaster, eh? Don’t you see it?”

“Yes, Sir Hildebrand, I see it. It is perfectly practicable, and I can undertake to carry it out.

The idea of such a gallery as you propose is a very happy one. It may be said, indeed, that the Castle requires such an apartment. It is, as the building now stands, a desideratum."

"Right, my dear sir," cried the baronet, exultingly; "right. A gallery such as I propose to construct is a requirement, a desideratum, and a necessity—a requirement, a desideratum, and a necessity. And when we communicate my idea to my friend Farland this evening at dinner, you will point out to him that it is so."

"Of course, Sir Hildebrand. The feature you propose to add thus to the Castle is so grand and important a one, that it is a pity that it cannot be managed on the southern front instead of on the northern front of the Castle. Think of what your gallery would be, Sir Hildebrand, if it were to the south, and commanded from its windows all the southern view and the grand terrace."

"Yes; I dare say. No doubt, no doubt. But what is the good of talking about what can't be? I am a practical man. I limit my ideas to the possible," said the baronet.

"And that is what we architects often have to wish in vain that our patrons would do, Sir

Hildebrand. But your notion is so grand a one that one cannot but wish that all the advantage possible could be drawn from it. However, if you will kindly come down to the room where my drawing materials are, I will just sketch out a representation of your idea."

So the little party went down to the room next the chapel, which had been fitted up as Purcell's office; and after offering to Miss Agnes the one chair in the room, and apologizing to Miss Artingale for having no second to offer to her, and adding that, if she ever honoured him with a second visit, she should find him better prepared in that respect, he went to a high desk, and, while Sir Hildebrand stood at his elbow, began rapidly to make a rough drawing of such a gallery represented on the southern side of the Castle.

"Pray don't apologize! I don't want to sit down," said Mary; "I would rather rummage about among these drawings, if I may?"

"Pray do! if you find anything to amuse you," said Lancaster, and went on with his drawing.

Presently Mary came up to the tall desk, on the

other side of him to that on which her father was standing, and, after for a moment looking at what he was engaged on, put out her hand to take a sketch-book which lay on the desk beside him. But Lancaster gently, but very quickly, laid his hand upon it so as to prevent her, turning to look at her with a smile in his eyes; and, in answer to her look of surprise and inquiry, put up his forefinger to his lips, with a movement as quick as lightning, in such a manner as that the action was seen by her only. Mary of course desisted from all further attempt to touch the forbidden book, much wondering what mystery it could possibly contain, and determining within herself to find an early opportunity of asking for an explanation of it.

“There, Sir Hildebrand, you see, is your idea put on paper, only that the gallery is shown on the southern front. Would it not be beautiful?”

“Oh! charming!” cried Mary; “it would be perfectly lovely! Why, papa, what a clever architect you are!”

“It would be very very magnificent indeed, Brand! truly noble!” said Miss Agnes, looking

at the drawing. "I give you great credit for the idea."

"Well! but," said the baronet, hesitating, and not quite recognizing his own conception in that which he was thus made the father of by acclamation, "how about the staircase?"

"Oh! the staircase we throw back a little, and improve it at the same time—your plan, Sir Hildebrand, involves that advantage; and the gallery passes in front of it"

"Throw back the staircase! Why don't you propose to take up the Castle and just turn it round, face about?" said the baronet, aghast at what appeared to him the audacity of the young man's proposal.

"Oh! that *would* be difficult, Sir Hildebrand. Now there is nothing difficult at all in the little change which is necessary for carrying out your idea of the gallery."

"Well, at all events, I am glad that you think my idea a valuable one. We shall see this evening what Farland says to it. He has a great deal of taste in these matters, but is perhaps hardly so practical a man in his ideas as is desirable in such things."

"I think Mr. Farland will not fail to see the

great beauty and desirability of your idea, Sir Hildebrand. We shall point out to him that you consider a noble gallery to be a requisite part——”

“A requirement, a desideratum, and a necessity,” interrupted the baronet.

“Exactly so, Sir Hildebrand; a requirement, a desideratum, and a necessity——”

“Right. That is the way to put it,” said the author of the happy phrase.

“And, I may say,” continued Purcell, with somewhat more of Jesuitry than was perhaps perfectly justifiable, “that I do not consider the trifling displacement of the staircase any insuperable objection to your scheme.”

Sir Hildebrand by this time was altogether persuaded that the scheme of moving the staircase, so as to have the gallery in the front of the house, was indeed the child of his own brain, and was contented to hear that, in laying the matter before Mr. Farland, he was to have the full credit of it.

“Perhaps you will have time before going to Farlandstoke to dinner to make a regular plan, that we may show to Farland,” said he to the young architect.

“Oh! quite time enough, Sir Hildebrand. I

will take care to have it ready, and take it with me to Farlandstoke. Five o'clock is Mr. Farland's hour?"

"Yes; and you had better go with me in the carriage. Never mind about much dressing—bachelor's party. The ladies are not going. I shall start at half-past four."

"Thanks, Sir Hildebrand; I will take care to be here and ready by that hour."

"Shall I encroach too much on your time, Mr. Lancaster," said Mary, almost *sotto voce*, though not palpably so, "if I come in here for a minute after luncheon with my poor drawing?"

"Not in the least; pray do! I shall be delighted to see your drawing," said Lancaster, opening the door of his little studio as the ladies, followed by Sir Hildebrand, passed out.

Sir Hildebrand had not heard a word of Mary's proposal, or he would probably have protested against any portion of the valuable time, which ought to be exclusively appropriated to preparing the projected plan, being diverted to the examination of his daughter's drawing. But Miss Agnes heard it; and though she said nothing (like the sailor's parrot), only thought the more.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE STUDIO.

AND, sure enough, a little after one o'clock—not much, for Mary was not long at her luncheon that day ; and I think it very probable that Aunt Agnes was left still discussing more deliberately her minced chicken and glass of sherry—a very little after one o'clock there came a rather timid little knock at Purcell's studio door. Of course it interrupted him in the midst of his busy endeavours to get the promised plans ready to take to Farlandstoke that evening. And of course, having this work on his hands, Mr. Lancaster had thought of nothing else all the morning since the ladies and Sir Hildebrand had left his studio. This is what it is clear on the face of the matter must have been the case. But then, considering some facts that were *not* on the face of the matter, I am inclined to suspect that just

the contrary was the case. I suspect that Mr. Purcell Lancaster had not put pencil to paper for the preparation of the drawing, and that he had been all the morning thinking of little else than the visit and the visitor who had now come to his door.

On hearing the knock he jumped from the one chair in the surveyor's-office-looking little room, and sprang to open the door. Mary entered very demurely and pupil-like, with her drawing-book in her hand. It had seemed to her when proposing to come that morning, and all the morning while thinking of it—for she too, if the truth were known, had been thinking of little else—that it was the simplest and most matter-of-course thing to do in the world. She was going to have a drawing lesson. That was all. Simply a drawing lesson. Surely she had had many lessons from sundry masters before now. How many hours had she not spent *tête-à-tête* with that poor young Barlow, the music master and organist, who used to ride over on his spavined pony from Sillbridge to give her lessons on the piano! But how came she to reflect on these things? How came it that all these justifications occurred to her mind?

I suppose that she never asked herself this impertinent question. For she was quite surprised on entering Purcell's studio to find all on a sudden that this coming for her drawing lesson was *not* quite so simple and easy a thing as it had seemed to her. Still, she could not at all make out why it was not so. Only, despite all she could say to herself, she felt that it was not so. She knew that she was blushing as she entered the room; and when the door closed behind her she felt as if she (almost) repented having come thither.

Nevertheless she put the best face upon the matter that she could.

"Here I am with my book, Mr. Lancaster. You told me I might come, you know. But I really think that it was indiscreet of me to ask so much of you; especially to-day, when you have those plans to prepare before dinner-time."

"Not at all, Miss Artingale. There is abundance of time," he said, speaking with perfect apparent ease of manner, but in reality almost as much fluttered as she was herself. "I shall be too happy if I can be of any service to you," he added, placing the one chair in the

studio by the large drawing-board, which did duty for a table, and standing himself a little behind her elbow as she sat down.

“But how have you got on with the plan of the new gallery? Papa was so pleased about it. Have you been very hard at work?”

“Not very, to tell the truth; but the plans will be all ready in good time.”

“You must work very rapidly, then, I suppose; may I see what you have done?”

“But am not I to see what *you* have done, Miss Artingale?” he said, smiling, and putting out his hand towards her drawing-book.

“All in good time,” she said, putting the book under her elbow, which was resting on the table; “let me see what you have done first. May I?”

“May I tell you one thing first, Miss Artingale? I feel that I ought to apologize to you for having asked you this morning not to speak of that drawing-book of mine, and to explain why I wished you not to open it.”

“Pray do not apologize,” she said; “and do not think it necessary to explain the mystery of the closed book unless you like it.”

“But I do like it,” he said; “and in truth, Miss Artingale, there is no reason why you

should not see every drawing in the book, save that it will destroy your opinion of my power of rapid work," he added, smiling.

"In that case indeed," she said, looking round, and up into his eyes, as he stood a little behind her, with a laughing face that seemed to him, so looking down into it, by far the loveliest he had ever seen, "in that case I may confess that my curiosity was a little excited by the mysterious volume—there it is on the desk there."

And she rose from her seat and went to the standing desk, on which the book in question was lying, as she spoke.

"May I open it then, now?" she said.

"You may open it, and examine every drawing it contains, Miss Artingale, if you have the patience to do so," he said, coming and standing by her side at the desk as he spoke.

Mary opened the volume accordingly; and the first page on which her eye rested showed her a completely finished plan of the gallery on the southern side of the house, together with references to other designs, showing in detail the whole scheme for the necessary removal of the staircase.

Mary looked from the open book up into

Lancaster's face for a moment, and then burst into a fit of laughing.

"This is why there is abundance of time, then, to bestow on me and my drawings, Mr. Lancaster. The plans for the gallery were all done before. And, pray, why was I not to see them this morning?"

"Do you not understand why, Miss Artingale? I thought it would vex your father to find that I had in truth anticipated his ideas, as he would have found if that drawing had been looked at this morning."

"Yes, I think I understand," said Mary, turning over the leaves of the drawing-book; "what a charming study of a clump of oaks that is," she said, stopping as she turned the leaves. "I should like to be able to do just such a drawing as that. But I hope, Mr. Lancaster, that you will not do one, and then make me believe that it is my work."

"I do not think that it would be easy to do that, Miss Artingale," said Lancaster, colouring deeply.

"I thought possibly you might be disposed to try, you know," she said, with an arch laugh, "on me as well as on another. Then all this

design was made, and the plans drawn as they are here before this morning, and you have not really been busy at all to-day. Well, I am glad at least that I am not in that case interfering, at all events, *so* disastrously with your time."

"You will always find me at leisure, Miss Artingale, to pay attention to anything you may want my assistance in, and only too happy to be allowed so to employ my leisure," said Lancaster, with perhaps somewhat greater warmth of manner than was altogether prudent. But Mary did not seem to observe it, or at all events was not displeased by it.

For she said, with her eyes fixed on the book of drawings on the desk, at which they were standing side by side, and in a voice little above a whisper, "you are *very* kind."

"Shall we look now at what you have done?" said Lancaster, taking her sketch-book from the large table-drawing-board, on which it was lying.

"Oh! I have very little to show," said Mary, taking the book from his hand, "and that little very bad. You must understand, Mr. Lancaster, that I am only a beginner, and have had scarcely any instruction."

"Let us see," said Purcell, opening the book

between them, as they continued to stand side by side at the tall drawing-desk; "is this group of trees the work you were engaged on this morning before breakfast?"

"Yes; and I really am ashamed of it. I think I can do better than that. But I worked in a great hurry, and I had only about an hour and a half."

"You should never let yourself work in a hurry. Work patiently, and never mind how small the quantity done may be."

"But I was in a hurry, because I wanted to have something to show you—to make a beginning of our lessons, you know," said Mary, still with her eyes glued to the desk, while her slender fingers were playing nervously with the leaves of the book.

"I must not blame the hurry, then. I should have lost much of what I prize more highly than I will say, if anything had prevented you from coming as you said you would, Miss Artingale," said Lancaster, in the some *sotto voce* tones that she had before used—immediately hurrying on to add, however, in a louder and more business-like voice, as if seized with a sudden consciousness that he was in danger of

slipping down an enticing and dangerous slope, from which it was necessary at once to escape—"but really the drawing is not so bad. There is individuality and character about the trees which it is always so difficult to beginners to attain. Anybody would see at once that that oak is an oak, and that Spanish chesnut a chesnut. And I assure you that is saying much more than can be said of the drawings of some professional artists."

"I am so glad you think so."

"In the drawings of my 'neat-handed Phillis,' as you call her, there is greater firmness of touch—the result of more practice—but there is more of character about your foliage. And that again is saying much, for little Bertha has a genuine and unmistakeable talent."

"Oh, of course I cannot compete with Miss Donne," said Mary in a tone, in which Lancaster's fine ear detected the presence of a slight feeling of pique, though Mary doubtless rendered no account to herself of the sentiments which had already begun to germinate at the bottom of that "desperately deceitful" organ, the heart, and which prompted the manifestation that had not escaped Lancaster.

Did he, Lancaster, render to himself any account, or form any hypothesis as to the cause of that slight manifestation of ill-humour which Miss Artingale had allowed, assuredly despite her own wish, to become perceptible when he had compared her drawing with little Bertha's, and had spoken highly of the talent of the latter? I suspect that, as is so often the case with our emotions, he was sensible of a feeling of pleasure, without stopping to ask himself wherefore. At all events it seems likely that there was more connection between that little manifestation of pique and a certain small bit of information respecting little Bertha, which he shortly afterwards took an opportunity of imparting to Miss Artingale, than mere accidental juxtaposition.

"Oh, of course I cannot compete with Miss Donne," Mary had said.

"Indeed, I think you could, Miss Artingale, if you were disposed to give as much time and labour to the pursuit as she does," he replied. And then, after some further conversation between them respecting Mary's sketch of that morning, he brought the conversation back again to Bertha, by saying—

“Do you know, Miss Artingale, I was sorry that that strange incident of that man running off in the way he did from the cottage when you and Miss Agnes came in sight happened as it did. I am specially sorry for it, because there was another person present at the time, to whom it was calculated to give possibly an unfavourable impression of Miss Donne.”

“What other person do you mean? Oh, I remember, that young American who dined that day at Farlandstoke was with us. What could it matter to him who frequented old Hannah’s cottage?” said Miss Artingale, looking up with wide eyes.

“Well, I do not think that I am betraying any secret in telling you, Miss Artingale, that the young American is disposed to consider that it matters very much to him who frequents the cottage in which Bertha Donne lives.”

“What! you don’t mean that Mr.—what is his name?—Fraser—Mr. Fraser has—‘views,’ as they say, in that direction?” returned Mary, with a bright look of interest in her face.

“That is precisely what I do mean, Miss Artingale—views of the most decided and business-like kind. And I suspect—very

strongly suspect—that they are views which little Bertha would not obstinately refuse to share. Now I have reason to think highly of Mr. Fraser, though my acquaintance with him is but a short one. All the world here knows and esteems old Captain Curling. He has known Fraser, it seems, all his life, and has the highest opinion of him. To me he seems a thoroughly good fellow. And in short, Miss Artingale, it has seemed to me a great pity that such an accident as that we witnessed should perhaps make mischief between them.”

“But, dear me, it is quite delightful!” said Mary, in high glee; “I should be so glad! poor little Bertha! But we must take care, Mr. Lancaster, that the accident, as you call it, shall not make mischief. I am quite sure that little Bertha is as good as gold, and quite sure that there never could be or ever have been anything of any sort between her and that disagreeable Mr. Hathaway.”

“But it ought to be explained what he was there for,” said Lancaster; “did you not observe, Miss Artingale, the embarrassment she was in? and you must be aware that your aunt much disapproved of what she saw.”

“Yes, but it shall be explained, and everything shall be put straight. And little Bertha shall become Mrs. Fraser, and I will dance at the wedding. I am so glad you told me of this.”

“But we must not run too fast, Miss Artin-gale,” said Lancaster, smiling; “Fraser has not made any declaration to Miss Donne yet, and——”

“But you do not doubt that he means to?”

“I think that he would have done so already, if it had not been for that man’s presence there that morning, and the strangeness of the way he went away, and Bertha’s evident confusion. Oh, yes, he is quite in earnest, as far as that goes.”

“As for her, we have known her—my aunt and I and my father—I may say, all her life; and you may feel quite safe in assuring your friend Mr. Fraser that she is as good a little girl as ever breathed—very far superior, as he may see for himself, indeed, to the station in which he now finds her, and that she would make as dear a little wife as a man could wish for. Dear me! there is aunt taking her walk on the terrace—I see her from this window at the other end of it—and I must go and join her.”

"I have seen Miss Agnes take two or three turns on the terrace," said Lancaster.

"And you never told me; fie! Mr. Lancaster."

"Nay, Miss Artingale, you could not expect me to volunteer to warn you away from my room."

"And I have only shown you one of the drawings I wished to ask you about, and we have wasted all the time in talking about other things. May I come for a real lesson another day, Mr. Lancaster?"

"It would give me great pleasure if you would do so," said he, moving to open the door for her.

"Well, about the same hour, then. But next time it must be a real serious lesson. Good morning, Mr. Lancaster."

And in another minute or two Lancaster saw her join her aunt on the terrace.

It was fortunate that the architect had the plans he had promised to take to Farlandstoke that evening all ready prepared; for had they not been so, it did not seem likely that they would have been finished. Purcell Lancaster had never in his experience felt so disinclined to work as he did when Miss Artingale left him.

It seemed wholly impossible to him to apply his mind to anything else than the careful and critical examination of every word which had been uttered between them—especially of those which had fallen from her lips. He went over and over again in his recollection each phrase she had used, and the look with which it had been accompanied. And in this occupation he remained immersed, sitting in the studio's one chair for more than an hour after the glory had departed from the bare-looking little room.

At last he started up, and placing himself at his desk, seized a pencil, and began to draw with a sort of fury.

“What folly, what worse than folly this is,” he muttered fiercely, between his closed teeth. “What am I about? What am I dreaming of? Whither am I going? This at least is clear, that I must stop short before I go any further! Further! What further could I go without reaching a point at which others would very efficiently take care for me that I went no further. And those dear, good old friends at Sillchester warned me against danger—against the danger of falling in love with that pretty little Bertha there at the cottage. They did not

guess that I was a stark, staring, mad idiot! They warned me of a danger that it was within the limits of probability that I might fall into, and never dreamed of such monstrous and incredible folly as I have been guilty of. *Have been* guilty of? Have I, the poor orphan chorister boy, fallen in love with the sole daughter and heiress of one of the proudest races in England? Why, I shall be a laughing stock to be pointed at! Why, Malvolio was nothing to me—a rational, modest-minded man in comparison! To love her is madness—utter, suicidal madness! To attempt to lead her to love me would under the circumstances be dishonour. That I can at least avoid. Avoid it, quotha! Imbecile, fatuous, stupid dolt that I am! Avoid it, as if there were any danger of such a consummation! Mary Artingale, the heiress of all the blood and all the pride of all the Artingales *love me!* Ha, ha, ha! I hardly think *that* danger needs much providing against. She is civil—affable—kind—cruelly kind, in the frank innocence of her heart. Unsuspiciously kind, because it does not enter into her head to think of *me* as of a creature of the same genus as herself. Does she not caress her horse?

There must be no more of this—no more—too much already—but no more. If she comes here again my reserve shall show her that I can understand and appreciate the distance that exists between Miss Artingale and her drawing master. I used to be able to say to my mind, go hither or thither, and compel obedience; I will see if I have lost the trick now. I will think no more of this lovely girl, think no more of her either in one way or another.”

And then he plied his pencil; and at the end of half an hour had made a very pretty and life-like likeness of Mary Artingale.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS AGNES' MEDITATIONS.

WHILE Purcell Lancaster had been with Mary Artingale in his studio perpetrating the foolishness which, as often happens, he had so energetically denounced and abominated as soon as it had been committed, Miss Agnes Artingale, first while finishing alone her luncheon at the table from which Mary had escaped, and then during her solitary walk on the terrace before her niece had joined her, had on her side been engaged in meditation.

Miss Agnes had perceived clearly enough that her niece—to put it in the plain, straightforward way, in which Miss Agnes put it to herself, in her own secret meditations—that her niece, Mary Artingale, the hope of the house of Artingale, was falling in love very rapidly with

Mr. Purcell, the ex-chorister of the cathedral at Sillchester, and at present a penniless and obscure young architect. And Miss Agnes had very little or no doubt that this very objectionable young gentleman was quite as quickly, or rather more quickly, falling in love with her niece. In the first place, she had herself observed Lancaster when in company with Miss Artingale, and when the observed parties little imagined that Miss Agnes was observing them, sufficiently to give rise to very strong suspicions on the subject. And Miss Artingale, as the reader knows, was not without some experience in such matters. In the second place, she was quite sure that Mary would not have made so much progress towards giving her heart away if it had not in some sufficiently intelligible way, though perhaps not by words, been sought for—decidedly sought for, even though the seeker should be innocent of any conscious intention of seeking it. Mary, no doubt, was as yet quite ignorant of the real state of the case. She had unquestionably never admitted to herself that she was falling in love with Purcell Lancaster—had never dreamed of such a thing—would probably be exceedingly shocked as

soon as she discovered the fact. But Miss Agnes knew that this is one of the facts which is apt to be discovered when too late.

Now this was a very serious condition of circumstances. Miss Agnes knew all the family hopes and plans with regard to the projected match with the heir of Farlandstoke; nay, had been herself a party to those plans. Mary, she thought, must be herself to a certain degree aware of them. And she had also thought that Felix Farland, being such as she had reason to believe him to be, might not unreasonably hope to win Mary's heart, and would, if he could do so, in all human probability, make her a very good husband, and render her a happy wife. She knew him to be a gentleman, honourable, upright, kind, well-intentioned, generous, frank, fearless, well-looking, and open-hearted. Why should not any girl love such a man? He had, it is true, the misfortune to be a blockhead. But what of that? Perhaps he would never have been so great a blockhead if his learned and bookish father had not striven so long and eagerly to force book-learning down his throat in defiance of the resistance of Nature. All men cannot be wonders of erudition. A dull

world if they were so. Why should not her niece love honest Felix Farland? And Miss Agnes had been able to give herself in her inmost conscience a favourable reply to this question. She had honestly thought that Mary might, could, should, would love Felix the heir of Farlandstoke, and be happy in that love.

But now the question became a very different one. Now it became a question whether Mary would be likely to be able to love Felix Farland, when Felix was put into competition with Purcell Lancaster, the latter having, moreover, the advantage of the start. Miss Agnes could not blind herself to the fact that, putting all question of social position aside, all comparison of the two men was simply absurd. To be sure there were plenty of girls who, if Felix Farland and Purcell Lancaster were put before them, would honestly prefer Felix. But was her niece Mary one of such girls? Was there the remotest chance that she would turn out to be one of such girls? Miss Agnes could but honestly reply to herself that there was no such chance. Could it ever have been that at any period of her life she herself, Miss Agnes, could have made such a choice? And again she

answered honestly, that she could never have so chosen. She had, indeed, as we know, sacrificed what she would fain have chosen to the requirements of "Artingale." But in her case renunciation only had been demanded. If more than that had been required—if it had been demanded of her not only that she should renounce her love, and live loveless, but that she should give her hand where she could not give her heart—would she, could she have complied? And Miss Agnes, thoroughly honest as ever, answered to herself again, that not even to satisfy the expectations of "Artingale" could she have done that. But was not this what it was likely that Mary might be called upon to do, with the fearful, the dreadful aggravation of having already learned to love elsewhere? And could she, Agnes, be a party to this calling upon her niece? Could she make a demand upon her niece which she herself with all her power of self-denial, and all her uncompromising principle, and all her high notions of what was due from every bearer of the name of Artingale to the honour of the house, would not, could not have complied with? Renunciation, self-denial, self-sacrifice was one thing,

and was possible—possible to any extent. But the accepting such a line of action as it seemed likely would be proposed to Mary Artingale was another thing.

And what was to be done? What could or ought she, Miss Agnes, seeing what she saw, and knowing what she knew, to *do*? Ought she to do anything? *Could* she do anything? Send Mary forthwith away? But where? How? For what assigned reason? Tell Sir Hildebrand that his daughter must be sent away from her home because she was in danger of falling in love with the architect engaged to restore the family mansion? He would think her, Miss Agnes, simply crazy, and crazed with a very disgraceful craze. He would just as soon have believed that his daughter was likely to fall in love with any one of the menial servants of the Castle. He would have deemed the suspicion wholly monstrous, a thing against Nature, an impossibility. Mary, a daughter of the house of Artingale. When had any such thing been heard of since Artingale was Artingale?

But if such a sending away were feasible, would it in the first place be effectual? Would Mary, being such as she was, and having

known and loved, or at least been far on the way towards loving Purcell Lancaster, be likely now to love Felix Farland? And in the second place, would she, Miss Agnes, be justified in taking such a step?

And upon this last question Miss Agnes ruminated much and long, bringing such wisdom as she could from her own experience and her own life to bear upon the subject. It was not now for the first time that Miss Agnes had doubted respecting the wisdom and rectitude of the course she had herself pursued. Since that never, never-forgotten day, when on the garden terrace of the Moat House at Sillchester she had refused the love of Sandgate Perivale, Miss Agnes had lived many years, had read much, and had thought more. And the result had been that she had doubted whether at that fateful turning point of the path of her life she had done wisely and well. Of the Rev. Sandgate Perivale, now a beneficed clergyman in the north of Sillshire, but still a bachelor, she heard from time to time. And she knew that that decision of hers, when she sacrificed everything to the honour of the Artingale name, had blighted not only one life, but two.

It was now some years that Miss Agnes, in her hours of thinking over the irrevocable past with that calm and tranquil but melancholy retrospection with which such a past would naturally be regarded, had begun to think that had she now to decide the question she had been called upon to decide at eighteen, she would probably decide it differently. It was not that she valued less than she did formerly the dignity, the honour, the historical associations of the grand old race to which she belonged. But larger views of the world, of life, and of the duties and destinies of mankind had led her to make some transpositions in her scale of duties and desirabilities.

Could she, therefore, now find it in her heart or her conscience to endeavour even to induce her niece either to make the sacrifice which she had made, or to face that still worse requirement, which she knew that she herself, even in her time of young enthusiasm for the Artingale "expectations," would have shrunk from facing?

And while these thoughts had been passing through her mind, she had been pacing up and down the eastern part of the great terrace in the spring sunshine, by no means impatiently

waiting for her niece to join her, and purposely avoiding to prolong her walk to the western end of the terrace, which would have caused her to pass in front of the architect's studio window, that it might not seem as if she were coming to look after her niece, or to summon her. Indeed, she was well pleased to be left for awhile alone ; for she wanted to think out her thoughts. And when Mary joined her on the terrace she had determined that she would take no such strong steps as have been spoken of, for the sudden breaking off of the path on which her niece seemed to be walking, but would allow things to take their natural course, and await the result.

So when Mary joined her on the terrace, having left Lancaster to the meditation which we know of, she merely asked her quietly whether Mr. Lancaster had been able to give her any assistance, and whether she thought that she should be able to pursue her drawing to any better advantage with the aid of any instruction he might be able to give her.

Mary recounted very faithfully the observations Purcell had made respecting her study of trees, and set forth, rather more enthusiastically

than she would have done, probably, had no unrecognized feeling prompted her, all the advantages which she hoped to gain from the suggestions of so competent an artist. Then her mind reverted to the incident of the drawing-book with the design of the projected new gallery, and the little trick which had been played off upon Sir Hildebrand; and she felt that it would have been an unfair telling of tales out of school to have said anything about this. So she remained with the consciousness on her mind—dangerous consciousness, so effective towards pushing people on upon the slippery inclined plane on which Mary was sliding—of a secret between her and Lancaster, which was their common property, to be shared with nobody else.

But then there was another chapter of her conversation with Lancaster on which she might speak, and in which she knew that her aunt would be interested. She repeated to Miss Agnes, therefore, all that Purcell had told her about Fraser and little Bertha, together with all the mischief that seemed likely to arise from their having surprised young Hathaway at the cottage the other morning.

“I am sure I hope it may come to pass, with all my heart,” said Miss Agnes. He really seemed to me to be a very nice young man, as far as I could judge by what I saw of him during the walk we had together—well educated beyond what one might have expected, and well mannered—a mate of a merchant ship, as I understand, which, I suppose, leads to being a captain, as Captain Curling is. Upon my word, very pretty promotion for little Miss Bertha!”

“And a very good catch for Mr. Fraser, I am sure,” put in Mary, staunchly.

“Yes; I believe Bertha to be a very good girl. But I do not wonder that the young man wishes to have all that mystery about that young Hathaway’s presence at the cottage, and his strange way of leaving it, and Bertha’s subsequent confusion, cleared up. It did not look pretty at all.”

“Oh! it will all be cleared up—it shall be cleared up. Depend on it, aunt, there is nothing wrong, at least on little Bertha’s part. Mr. Lancaster spoke to her about it, and was quite convinced by her answers that she, at least, had no desire to see Mr. Hathaway there, and no wish for his return. But it seems that

he made her promise not to mention the purpose of his visit."

"Very wrong, that," said Miss Agnes. "And it is all very mysterious; and I don't like mysteries, especially where young women are concerned. Mr. Fraser is quite right to pause till the meaning of such strange behaviour can be accounted for."

"Mr. Lancaster had no doubt, being as it seemed in Mr. Fraser's confidence, and to a certain degree in little Bertha's also, that it would all come right."

"You seem to have found time, Mary dear, to discuss a variety of subjects with Mr. Lancaster besides your drawing lesson. You must have chattered very fast, and made the most of your time."

"I don't know, aunt," said Mary, looking down to the flagstones of the terrace on which they were walking with a very tell-tale blush; "Mr. Lancaster referred to this news about Bertha because he knew that we are interested in her."

"I rather wonder," continued Miss Agnes, rather maliciously, it must be confessed, "I rather wonder that Mr. Lancaster did not fall

in love with her himself, domesticated under the same roof with her as he is. For my part, I think that Bertha is a very attractive little body, with her pretty face and neat little ways and cleverness. I think I should have fallen in love with her if I had been a young man, and in Mr. Lancaster's position."

"Oh, aunt! I do think that is nonsense. I like Bertha very much, and think very highly of her; but I cannot agree with you in thinking it at all likely that Mr. Lancaster should fall in love with her, or that she would have made a fitting wife for him."

"Dear me! why not? I thought that Bertha was such a favourite of yours, Mary?" said Miss Agnes.

"So she is, aunt. And I think that she will make an excellent wife for Mr. Fraser, and I am delighted that he should think so. But Mr. Lancaster is so totally different a person—a different *kind* of person altogether—a person who would require—I hardly know how to express what I mean—whose wife, if ever he has one, would be in every respect a lady, which we can hardly consider our little Bertha to be, clever and good as she is, and much as we like her."

“Certainly not, my dear. But is not the pretension which you are putting forth on behalf of Mr. Lancaster rather an exorbitant one for a man who was brought up by the charity of the Sillchester Chapter as a chorister?” said Miss Agnes, intent rather on seizing the opportunity of dropping some words of warning into her niece’s ear for her own behoof, than on laying down any well-considered proposition of sociology.

“But, whatever he may have been, his past life has made him now a gentleman in every sense of the word; and if you will observe him a little, aunt, I am sure that you will agree with me that he would not be likely to marry any save a lady,” replied Mary.

“Perhaps you are right, my dear. And it may be with him, as it has often been with others, that the superiority of his cultivation to his social position may be a misfortune to him in that respect. For it is not probable that he would be deemed an eligible suitor for the hand of one whom we should consider in all respects a lady. But it is a difficulty which we are not called upon to discuss; and I am sure I do not know how we came to talk upon such a subject.”

"Nay, aunt; it was you began by wondering why Mr. Lancaster did not fall in love with little Bertha," said Miss Artingale.

"Ah! so it was. It was my fault. Do you know whether your mother will come down to dinner to-day, or shall we be *tête-à-tête*, my dear?"

And so the conversation during the rest of the walk passed to topics the discussion of which threw no light on the subject-matter of this narrative. What had already passed, however, between the aunt and the niece in the above little digression, in some sense served the purpose Miss Agnes had intended to serve by introducing it. It served to set Mary thinking on sundry possibilities and contingencies, and on what might be, ought to be, or should be if such contingencies should become actualities. It served also to reveal to her consciousness certain proclivities of her own heart, of which she had hitherto rendered to herself no account. But it is much to be doubted whether all this at all tended to stave off the danger which Miss Agnes had descried ahead, and to which she had thought it prudent thus indirectly to call the attention of her niece.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WILL CAPTAIN CURLING SAY?

THE dinner at Farlandstoke passed just as it was intended to pass. At the upper end of the table Sir Hildebrand and Mr. Farland and Lancaster talked architecture and discussed plans; and at the other end Felix and George Fraser ripened their acquaintanceship into intimacy over the Farlandstoke port so far as to lead first to a mention by Fraser of the incident of finding young Hathaway at the cottage, and from that to a confidential confession of his own feelings as to little Bertha.

“Do you think he saw you—you and the ladies—coming?” said Felix.

“Oh, clearly he did; no mistake about that,” said Fraser. “He sneaked round the cottage as sly and lissom as a Red Indian. There was no

path the way he went. He made a regular bolt of it the moment he winded us."

"Devilish odd, any way; but—you may take my word for it—there was nothing between him and Bertha in the way of love-making. You may be quite sure of that," said Felix, authoritatively.

"But why be so sure of that? I suppose them lawyer chaps do make love sometimes as well as others."

"Ah, but he is not the sort," said Felix, gravely considering the proposition which had been laid before him. "As for love-making of one sort—Lord bless you! it would not do. The girl is a good girl—as good as gold—all the neighbourhood know it. And then he is not the man. Bless you, he is on his best behaviour. And there would be such a row as would make the country too hot to hold him. Then as for love-making of t'other sort, he is not the man for that either. Master Jonas won't put his neck into the halter without being well paid for it. No. Master Jonas will want money. No, no. It was nothing of *that* sort took him to the cottage, you may swear," said Felix, shaking his head.

“But what the devil *could* it have been? Why should he run off in that manner?” continued Fraser.

“I don’t know. Something to do with money, some way or other, most likely. Tell you what it might be,” said Felix, struck by a sudden idea. “The old woman may have saved a trifle of money out of her pension, and may have employed him to put it out for her. And she’d be likely enough to be as secret as the grave about that. And the not being able to tell the old woman’s secret would account for the girl’s confusion. Yes; I’ll bet a trifle that is what it was,” said Felix; and really the explanation did not seem an impossible one.

Meantime the plan of the new gallery on the south front of the Castle, and the proposed change in the position of the staircase—duly set before Mr. Farland as the realization of an idea of the baronet—met with that gentleman’s entire, and indeed enthusiastic, approval. He felt, indeed, but was too courteous, and had too much tact to express considerable surprise at the very striking improvement in his conceptions and understanding of such matters manifested by the baronet, and perhaps had some little suspicion

of the real authorship of the idea. Sir Hildebrand also showed some signs of a little uncomfortable feeling under the praises which his friend lavished upon his masterly conception. But on the whole the dinner and the old port-bedewed hour after it passed pleasantly enough. And when the party passed from the dining-room to the library for their coffee, the baronet very comfortably went to sleep, while Mr. Farland was very happy in showing his younger guest a variety of magnificent architectural works; and his son and George Fraser continued to cement their friendship over various talk of ships and dogs and horses and Red Indians, amid which ever and anon the conversation returned to little Bertha, and George's hopes and fears on that subject, and Felix's thorough-going approbation and encouragement.

The evening having passed thus, there had been no opportunity for any talk between Lancaster and Fraser. Purcell would have much preferred walking home with George, for it was a beautiful night; but he thought that it would not be civil to leave Sir Hildebrand to go home alone after having used his carriage to come there. So he seized a moment before stepping

into the baronet's carriage to make an appointment with Fraser for a long walk on the following Sunday morning. Lancaster, it was settled, should call for George at Woodbine Cottage; and then they would walk to Billmouth, and then home by a rather curious old house, called Garstang Grange, situated about four miles to the westward of Billmouth on a high down overlooking the sea—a place which Lancaster was curious to see—a good long round altogether.

This having been settled, Lancaster left the baronet at his own door, and betook himself to his solitary little room at the cottage. Old Hannah and her granddaughter had long since gone to bed; but he had the key of the cottage in his pocket, and found a candle left burning for him in the kitchen.

He went up to his little room, cautiously avoiding the least noise; but instead of going forthwith to bed, as rational men do who are not in love, he opened the southern window, and sat down at it to enjoy the moonlight, which was streaming into it, and to think.

He sat down to think; and he did think for some two hours, deeply and seriously with an earnestness of purpose and steadiness of view

not very common among young gentlemen in love who sit down to think by the moonlight.

In the first place he satisfied himself of the undeniable certainty of the fact that he was absolutely, and to all intents and purposes, deeply and passionately in love with Miss Mary Artingale. And perhaps he lingered over this chapter of his meditations somewhat longer than was absolutely necessary for reaching that conclusion.

The next stage of his meditations landed him with quite equal certainty in the firm resolution to take no advantage of the position in which his fate had placed him for the confession of his love to the object of it, and much less for any endeavour to obtain her love in return. Putting aside for the moment all consideration of the improbability that Miss Artingale would listen to any such avowal with any feeling save one of unmitigated contempt and displeasure, it would be, he told himself, dishonourable and base in the extreme to use the means at his command, if indeed any such were at his command, for the bringing of so great a distress and calamity upon the worthy family who were trusting him and treating him with kindness, as his winning the

affections of the sole daughter of their house and name would be to them. Did he not know what were the intentions of the family with respect to Miss Artingale's hand? And did he not perfectly understand all the social and worldly propriety and advantage of an alliance with the wealthy heir of the ancient race of Farland? That a marriage between him and Miss Artingale should be permitted to take place was too monstrous a thought to be admitted for a moment. And what but misery to the girl he loved could be the result of her loving him? Ought he not in every way to guard against the possibility of such a catastrophe—were it not, indeed, that the bare notion of its being necessary for him to guard against it would imply a fatuity and coxcombry in him so outrageous, that it was humiliating even to contemplate himself in such a position.

No; come what might he would never be guilty of any such treachery as this. Whatever suffering might be laid on his shoulders to bear, his shoulders, and his alone, should bear it. Or if it was more than he could bear, he would sink under it. But he would shift no part of it on to those of the kind people who had re-

ceived and trusted him, and least of all—oh, an hundredfold least of all!—would he make her whom he loved a sharer in the grief that was his.

Never, never, never, would he speak, or look, or hint of love to the heiress of Artingale!

And then, this point having been thus fully and irrevocably settled, his mind applied itself in a very earnest and business-like manner to another subject of thought; and in doing so gave no slight evidence of a capability of adhering bravely and loyally to the resolution he had just so loyally formed.

But what this latter subject of his meditations was will, perhaps, best be learned from a part of the conversation which took place between him and George Fraser during their walk to Billmouth and to Garstang on the following Sunday.

The weather was still fine, and the two young men started on their excursion as proposed.

“I wish I could go with you, boys, with all my heart,” said Captain Curling, as he stood at the door of Woodbine Cottage, at which Lancaster had called for George, according to arrangement; “but I never walked much off my

own deck, even when I was young; and now I should founder half-way between this and Billmouth. If it was a sailing spree, now! But look here, Mr. Lancaster, you will dine with us here at the cottage when you come back, eh? Don't say no, there is a good fellow. You will? Good boy. Five o'clock. And then I shall have my share of the day's fun."

So it was settled that they should return from their walk in time for the captain's five o'clock dinner.

It was a very pretty walk along the banks of the estuary of the Bill to Billmouth. The gently sloping banks are well wooded; and when the tide is in the water rolls in a really magnificent extent, well-nigh from the foot of the trees on the one side to the foot of the trees on the other. As the stream nears the little port at its mouth the woodland ceases, the banks, though still low, become rocky, and various sea-like forms, all more or less picturesque in their way—here a small building-yard, able to turn out a sloop of a hundred tons or so, there an old boat, bottom upwards, undergoing the process of pitching, and a little further on, nets in considerable quantities laid

out to dry—all indicate the approach to the coast.

And both young men were of those capable of enjoying all these varied elements of the picturesque ; but neither of them, on the present occasion, seemed to be much in the cue to do so. Both appeared to be preoccupied by thoughts not altogether attuned to enjoyment. After a silence which had succeeded to the few first words of course, as they started on their walk, Lancaster was the first to speak.

“I don’t think you seem to be in as good spirits, Fraser, as I should be in were I in your place. I could find it in my heart to envy you your love for that very lovable little girl at the cottage,” he said.

“My mind misgives me that she will never consent to leave her grandmother to go away over the sea to a new country with me. And then I am uneasy about that man’s presence there, and her evident discomposure at having been caught in his company,” said Fraser.

“You may trust me, my dear fellow, that there was nothing in that matter that you need trouble your head about. The little lady told me this much—that she had never wished or

thought of seeing Mr. Jonas Hathaway at the cottage—that he had come to ask certain questions of her grandmother, and, fearing that the old woman would not tell him what he wanted to know, had been begging her to try and obtain the information needed from her grandmother. What the matter in hand was, she had, at his request, promised him not to divulge. And she conjured me to tell nobody as much as I have told you now—giving me leave afterwards to tell one certain person, in a manner which, if you could have seen it, would have gone far, I fancy, to cure your doubts as to her caring for you. I think you a very lucky fellow, I can tell you.”

“Did she though, really? Did she say you might tell me, but nobody else? The little darling!” cried George.

“Yes, she did, indeed. But now, Fraser, I want to talk to you about another matter, which has been a great deal in my thoughts lately, and which I can’t get out of my mind,” said Lancaster.

“What, something of your own in the same line?” said Fraser, smiling; “out with it, man, and we will comfort one another.”

“No, Fraser; nothing of that sort; I am not

so fortunate. No, no. It is quite a different sort of matter, and a very serious one," said Lancaster, with a sort of uneasiness that seemed to indicate that he did not well know how to begin what he wanted to say.

"Something serious," cried Fraser, looking into Lancaster's face with an altered expression, and a sudden, shrewd glance; "I don't like that. No trouble, I hope?"

"No trouble, so far as I can see, to either you or me," said Lancaster, slowly; "but——"

"But what? What can be so serious, if it means no trouble or sorrow to either of us?" said Fraser, cheerily.

"May there not be trouble to others, whom we would fain not trouble——"

"Nothing about Bertha?" cried Fraser, with a sudden sense of cold about the heart.

"No; nothing about Bertha; at least, nothing that need trouble Bertha, or you for her. But now, Fraser, you must give me all your attention."

"All right. I'll keep a bright look out," said the young sailor.

"And yet I must begin by speaking about Bertha," said Lancaster, again hesitating.

"For heaven's sake, do get on, man alive!" said Fraser, again shooting a sharp, eager look into Purcell's face.

"You will see that it is not so easy a matter to get on as you say. But now listen. I told you that Bertha had confided to me that young Hathaway came to the cottage to try and get certain information from the old woman, and that Bertha had permitted me to tell you as much. Very well. That was just so. But afterwards, being anxious both for her own sake and for yours that the matter should be satisfactorily cleared up, I did succeed in learning from her the nature of those inquiries."

"Then why did you not tell me at once?" said Fraser.

"Because Bertha implored me not to do so," replied Lancaster.

Fraser's brow grew dark as he said, "I thought you told me there was no trouble ahead?"

"Nor is there for you or for Bertha. Do not be in such a hurry, but attend to me. Perhaps there is nothing at all ahead, as you call it, for anybody."

"Well; this is getting gradually, I should

say, pretty nearly as clear as that mud that the tide is leaving there. Only I *should* like to know what it was that Bertha was so anxious to keep from me," said Fraser, still feeling by no means comfortable.

"You will see, if you will let me speak," returned Lancaster, "that she had no cause to imagine that it could interest you in any way. If I tell you now, you will promise me to speak of the matter to no human being till I agree with you to do so?"

"That depends," said Fraser, stoutly; "I don't like making promises in the dark. If it is not my clear duty to speak, I will promise to be silent."

"Well; I have no doubt you will be reasonable, and you would not wish to make trouble for Bertha—that is the only consideration. Now, once again mark what I am going to say. Old Hannah, you know, was, years and years ago, a confidential servant of Sir George Artingale, the father of the present baronet——"

"What do I care what old Hannah *was*? I see what Bertha *is*!" interrupted Fraser, impetuously.

"Did I not tell you that the matter did not

seem to have any interest for you? Do let me tell you what is in my mind as well as I can."

"Go ahead, under easy sail, then, in your own fashion," said Fraser, with an air of resignation.

"Well; what young Hathaway the attorney wanted to find out from old Hannah was whether she knew anything about a marriage of Sir George Artingale previous to his marriage with the lady who was the mother of Sir Hildebrand and Miss Agnes," said Lancaster, with an air of solemn mystery.

Fraser looked at his friend in utter amazement and mystification.

"What can that signify to anybody?" said he.

"Signify? it may signify a precious deal! Suppose that there was a previous marriage, and suppose that there had been foul play of some sort, don't you see that Sir Hildebrand and Miss Agnes would be illegitimate children, with no more right to call themselves Artingale than you or I have?" said Lancaster.

"Foul play! what do you mean by foul play? You don't mean murder?" said George, staring at his friend's face.

"Murder? No; who said anything about

murder? But if there was a previous marriage, and the wife were living at the time of the second marriage, that second marriage, as you can understand, would be no marriage at all. You understand that?" said Lancaster, pausing.

"Yes; I can understand that," replied Fraser; "but what does it signify, now, whether it was a marriage or no marriage?"

"Signify? why it will signify what I told you just now, that Sir Hildebrand and his sister would be illegitimate," said Lancaster.

"And what would it matter if they were illegitimate?" said the republican young sailor.

"Only just this—that Artingale Castle and all the Artingale estates would belong not to Sir Hildebrand, but to somebody else," said Lancaster, almost shuddering at the greatness of the catastrophe referred to.

"You don't say so. And who would it all belong to, then?" inquired Fraser, with at last some show of interest.

"Ay; that is the question," said Lancaster, pausing for awhile before he proceeded.

"That is just the question," he repeated; "if there had been such a marriage, and any son born from it were living, he would be the

owner of Artingale, or his son, if he had died leaving one. But if no such son had been born, and the lady married by the first marriage were alive at the date of the second, then some cousin or other heir would succeed; but in no case would the child of a marriage which was no marriage succeed to the title and inheritance."

"But do you think, Lancaster, that the old man there at the Castle, and specially Miss Agnes, would be guilty of such a thing?" said Fraser, looking much shocked.

"Certainly not; but they would know nothing about it, don't you see? The old baronet, Sir Hildebrand's father, who by all accounts was as big a scamp as ever stepped, and was capable of anything—he would have got rid of the first wife for the sake of marrying the second, and of course have kept his own counsel."

"It seems a common sort of trick with your aristocrats," said Fraser, thinking of his own grandmother's story.

"Not very common, I think," said Lancaster, looking hard into Fraser's face.

"Odd, if it isn't, that I should have come to

hear of two cases," said Fraser; "but how does it follow that because this lawyer chap was asking questions about a previous marriage of Sir George Artingale—how does it follow, I say, from that, that the wife of that marriage should have been alive at the time of the second marriage, or should have left a son behind her?" asked he, shrewdly.

"Well, it was clear that Hathaway's inquiries pointed at some such suspicion. You may depend upon it, he has got on the trace of some evidence of some sort."

"If he has, why does not he go straight to Sir Hildebrand, and have the matter inquired into?" asked Fraser, innocently.

"Because that is not the way such fellows as he go to work. If he has become possessed of such a secret as that he feels that he has found a very valuable treasure, and his only thought is how to make the most of it. His first object would be to find out cautiously who is the true heir, if there is one. It is clear, I think, by his going to old Hannah in that way, that it is only some trace that he has found—enough to put him on the track—but not more."

"Well, as you said, I suppose it does not

much matter to either of us or to anybody who is very dear to us," said Fraser.

Lancaster started visibly as Fraser spoke, and a cold spasm shot to his heart, succeeded in the next moment by a hot glow. It had never occurred to him, till Fraser spoke those words, that if indeed Sir Hildebrand Artingale should be proved to have no right to that name and title and to the estates that belonged to it, then it might well be that Mary, fallen from her high estate, might be within his reach if he could win her. Strange as it may seem, this incidental consequence of the catastrophe on the probabilities of which he had been meditating had not presented itself to him. Now that it was suddenly presented to him, it seemed to put the whole matter in a totally different light, and especially to cause his relation to it to present itself to his mind under a different aspect.

"I did *not* say," rejoined he, slowly, and after a long pause, during which Fraser had been looking at him with a surprised but shrewd and observant glance—"I did *not* say that it did not much matter to either of us, or to any who is dear to us. This young Hathaway has, I think it is clear, found out nothing more than some trace

of the existence of a previous marriage of Sir George Artingale. But suppose I had discovered the real heir!"

Lancaster stopped short, and looked hard into the open, unsuspecting face of his companion.

"*You* discovered it," said Fraser. "What, are you taking to lawyering, too?"

"I have a very strong notion—a strangely strong notion—that I *have* found out who is the genuine heir to Artingale Castle, without any lawyering at all. My belief is that I am now speaking to the real heir to the name, title, and estates of Artingale."

"What—what *air* you talking about? I think that this talking of secrets and mysterious inquiries, and the deuce knows what all, has addled your brain, I do, upon my life," said Fraser, staring at Lancaster as if he really thought that he had lost his senses.

"I tell you, Fraser," said Purcell, slowly and clearly, "that I believe you to be the heir of Sir George Artingale by his first wife, and the legitimate owner of yonder Castle, and the estate belonging to it."

"Would you mind trying to explain what on earth has put such a wild notion into your

head?" said Fraser, who really began to think that the young architect was a different sort of a man from the sober, sensible fellow he had taken him for.

"Yes, that is just what I want to do. I want to try if I can explain to you what has appeared so convincing to my own mind; but I do not know that I shall be able to succeed," said Lancaster, quietly.

"To tell you truth, I think it most likely you will not," rejoined Fraser, rather drily.

"I will try at all events. I understood from you that your grandmother had emigrated to America from England, having been persuaded to do so by some person, some man of fortune, to whom she believed herself to have been married in Scotland, but who denied that that apparent marriage had been a valid one. Am I right so far?"

"Quite right, so far," said Fraser.

"Now the second marriage of Sir George Artingale must have taken place nearly, but I think not quite, fifty years ago. And that would just about tally with the date of your grandmother's emigration to America. Is not that so?" asked Lancaster.

“Yes, that would be about it. You are still right thus far,” said Fraser.

“And these things are *not* common among our aristocracy, whatever you may think,” said Lancaster, emphatically. “The coincidence of facts and of dates is already enough to make a strong case.”

“Possibly there might be enough to attract one’s attention, if it were clear that Sir George Artingale had persuaded any woman to whom he had pretended to be married to go to America. But you forget, my dear fellow, that we have no certainty that anything of the sort ever took place,” said Fraser, with the clearness of a good and shrewd natural intelligence.

“No, I do not forget that. We *know* nothing. We are only looking at probabilities. I have lived in this county all my life. Sir George Artingale was very well known to everybody—he and his manner of life. I have often heard him talked of; and I never heard, and I am persuaded that nobody in the county ever heard of his having been a widower at the time of his marriage with the Lady Geraldine, the daughter of the Earl of Foxley. Yet this attorney is making inquiry about a previous marriage; and

he inquires of an old servant. The previous marriage, therefore, whether false or real, must have been in all probability a secret one. Were there no possibility that it might have been, or grounds for thinking it possible that it might have been a real and not a pretended marriage, there could be little object in making any inquiry about it now. I assume, therefore, that young Hathaway has in some way or other obtained evidence, or some grounds for suspecting that Sir George Artingale was well and truly married before he married the mother of the present Sir Hildebrand. There would be nothing strange in such having been the case, *if* the fact were a public and notorious one. But such was not the case. We have therefore got thus much to go on. There are reasons for thinking that Sir George Artingale made a secret marriage some time previous to the date at which your grandmother was persuaded to go to America, because some man of rank and fortune, who had married or pretended to marry her, wanted to get rid of her. These are the facts we have before us. I think I have stated them accurately?"

"Yes, all that is true. Some of your facts, however, are mere assumptions. But even if

they were ascertained facts, it seems to me very wild to build such a conclusion as you propose to build on them. It seems to me as regular a leap in the dark as ever man made," said Fraser, shrugging his shoulders.

"The assumptions are, as you say, assumptions, but they are highly probable ones. And granting them, it does seem to me that the circumstances would present a strikingly strong case. But for all that I do not think that I should have been struck by them, or so struck as to be impressed in the very strong manner in which I *am* impressed, had it not been for another very notable fact, which is as it were a guide-post to the truth lying hidden in the other circumstances," continued Lancaster, with increasing earnestness.

"And that fact?" said Fraser, eyeing his companion almost with an expression which might be supposed to be that of a mad-doctor having a conference with a patient for the purpose of ascertaining the state of his mind.

"And that fact is the very extraordinary likeness between you and the Artingale family," said Lancaster, looking up into his face.

"Bah! a mere fancy. What is there in the

likeness of one man to another?" returned Fraser.

"I am something of an artist, and have an eye for such things. Nevertheless, I should not be sufficiently sure of my own eye to trust to its single report. But the same thing has struck others, observers perfectly independent of one another. Both Mr. and Mrs. Henningtree remarked it, and were sufficiently impressed by it to speak of it on their return to Sillchester from Farlandstoke. Bertha is an artist, with an eye trained therefore to observe similarities and differences of form and outline. And she was struck by the same remarkable similarity. And what do you think caused the old woman, her grandmother, to behave in the extraordinary manner you told me of, when she first saw you? What, but the strange and striking likeness in all probability between you and the man whom I believe to have been your father, her old master?"

"Well, if all these people see it, I suppose there must be such a likeness. But what then? What is more common than a likeness between one man and another?" asked Fraser.

"But it is not only between one man and another," persisted Lancaster. "In a case of

this kind a much stronger inference may be drawn from a similarity to a race than from a mere likeness to an individual. The man who resembles all the members of a family in those fundamental lines which make the family character of a face, who resembles different generations of that family, may be almost safely backed to belong to that family. Now listen to an experiment which I tried. I sketched, side by side, two heads, one as like to you, and one as like to the marble head of that effigy of old Sir Hildebrand, which we saw in the chapel, as I could make them; and without saying one word to lead to the remotest guess as to what they were intended for, I placed them before Bertha, and asked her if she recognised them and was struck by any observation respecting them. She said at once that the drawings represented you and the statue of old Sir Hildebrand, and that the two heads were strikingly alike. Now, what do you say to that?"

"I admit that it seems to prove that I must be like not only any one of the family, but like to the family face. But it seems to me an accident, which cannot be built on to prove anything;" said Fraser.

“Certainly, it *proves* nothing; but, taken in conjunction with the other circumstances, I do think that it makes out a very strong case of probability,” said Lancaster, thoughtfully.

“Bah! I don’t like to let such thoughts come into my head. But suppose all you have said did make out, as you say, a strong case of probability, what then? What would you have of it?” said Fraser.

“It may be,” replied Lancaster, after a pause, “that the reply to that question needs considerable deliberation. It may be that it needs such consideration as neither you nor I are competent to give to it. What I would *have* of it? It seems to me, looking at the matter as I see it now, that we ought to consider the matter, and if there shall appear due grounds for action, to act in the matter without any reference to what either you or I would have of it. *Right* should, and ought to be done. What would an upright lawyer, who had accidentally discovered all these circumstances, and who had no interest in the matter in any way, do. His first thought his *instinct* would be that the wrong that has been done must be put right.”

“That seems all fair and good,” said the

young sailor, speaking for the first time, thoughtfully, and after some consideration; "but at any rate it seems to me that we are not in a position to *do* anything. As I said, I do not like to let any such thoughts come into my head. Just fancy! I, a mate in a merchantman, hailing from Salem, who, a month or so ago, had never heard of any of these people, or they of me, all of a sudden say, 'Old man, you must clear out of this: you and yours, who have been reckoned the first folk in the country, and the owners of all this grand place, must clear out, and give it all up to me. I am Sir George Artingale, and it all belongs to me.' Why, I should be packed off to Bedlam before I could say, 'Jack Robinson!' I, Sir George Artingale, stuff and nonsense! Mere madness."

"Stranger things have happened before now," said Lancaster, almost sadly; "but, as I said, we have need of better counsel than our own. And I am sure I do not know where to seek it."

"Oh, bother it! let the matter alone. Everybody is contented as it is. I don't want to be Sir George Artingale. I had rather remain plain George Fraser, respected by his owners,

and known to keep the craft he ships in, and the crew too, in trimmer shape than here and there another. A pretty English baronet I should make! What would the king of England say to it? No, no; let it alone, I say."

"Fraser, you have no right to say so, or to act so," returned Lancaster, gravely and earnestly. Think how widespreading such a wrong is. Think of that poor old grandmother at home, who has suffered so much, and has been so bitterly wronged, not in her fortunes only, but in her fair fame. Think of the relatives who may even yet be ashamed to speak of her, the only one of their name who ever came to shame. Ought not this to be righted, if only for her sake?"

"If I could right her, or if my poor father could have righted her, by taking by the throat the scoundrel who wronged and cheated her, there is not the castle in England that should have sheltered him!" said the young American, with a gleam in his eye and a convulsive clutching of his fingers.

"But that is not the way to get at the right. And in all human probability the doer of the wrong, whether, as I strongly suspect, it were

Sir George Artingale or another, has gone to his account. There is neither room for nor question of vengeance. But it may not be too late for right."

"But what would you have me do?" asked Fraser.

"That is the question. Think to begin with; we must think what can be done," said Lancaster.

"Why not see what this fellow Hathaway has to say about it?" said Fraser.

"Because it would be too costly for any means that either you or I could command. Because you would only be playing his game, without getting any assistance towards playing your own. No, that would not do. Remember that such secrets as he has found, in all probability, some trace of are saleable in two different markets."

"I'll tell you what I will do," cried Fraser; "I will tell the whole story to old Curling, and see what he thinks of it."

"Well; you know him well, and I scarcely at all. I should not have thought myself of pitching on an old sea-captain to consult on a thorny question of law; but——"

"Any way, it cannot do no harm. I would trust old Curling with my life in his hand any

day. He will say nothing unless he is asked to. And you may say what you will about an old sea-dog; but I can tell you that Curling has a head on his shoulders, and a good one. He never lost a ship in his life. And then he is the only real, leastways the only old, friend I have in these parts," said Fraser.

"Well, then, be it so. We will tell him all about it after dinner to-day. Any way, I shall be surprised if he advises you to take no heed of the matter."

So it was decided that the old sea-dog should be called to council; and the two young men were at liberty, this point having been settled, to pay attention to the pretty scenery through which they were walking. * There was nothing more to be said about the matter; and Fraser protested that he would rather not occupy his thoughts on it. Nevertheless, as may be easily imagined, they did go on talking in a desultory fashion on the same topic during the whole of their walk. But as they made no progress towards the discovery of any further step to be taken in the matter, it is not necessary to follow their conversation further.

Lancaster found it very difficult to prevent

his mind from dwelling on that aspect of the affair which might be all important to himself. Yes; Mary, the penniless daughter of the ousted and nameless son of an unmarried mother, would doubtless be in a position not too high for him to hope to reach her. But should not that very consideration avail to prevent him from aiding to bring her to that pass? Should he be the means of bringing Mary Artingale to beggary, in the hope that she might then share his beggary with him? But the only reply he could make to himself on that head was the same which he had made to Fraser, when he had asked what he would have him do. Let the *right* be done, irrespective of what anybody might desire in the matter. Let them seek to establish the *right*, blindly as to what the results of that right doing might be.

In short, *Fais que dois advienne que pourra!* should be his guiding rule in this matter.

And with that in his mind, Lancaster reached the gate of Woodbine Cottage, and the two young men went in to dine with their old host. Neither of them broached the subject which was uppermost in both their minds till the dinner was over and the captain had filled his

pipe. Then Lancaster told the old man all that he had urged on Fraser, carefully setting in the strongest light the various points that seemed to him to support the probability of his suggestion. It will not be necessary to make the reader go over the telling of the story again, even for the sake of the captain's expression of his overpowering amazement. The story of Fraser's grandmother, as far as it was known to Fraser himself, he had long ago heard. And it is the less necessary to give at length any portion of the conversation between the old man and his two young friends, because the captain, when he had heard all that could be told him, while at once cordially concurring with Lancaster that it was the bounden duty of George to claim his right, if there were any probable grounds for supposing that any such right existed, declined to pronounce then and there any opinion on this point, or to extemporize any advice as to what course should be pursued.

"I must have time to think about it, lads," said the captain. "Meanwhile, best not say a word. Don't be piping the hands up before we have settled what course we mean to sail. Let me think about it."

BOOK IV.

LOVE, THEY SAY, IS BLIND.



CHAPTER I.

“LOVE WILL STILL BE LORD OF ALL.”

MEANWHILE things continued to go on in their quiet course both at Artingale and Farlandstoke, just as if no likeness had been observed between the Artingale family and the American stranger, and as if Captain Curling's mind were occupied by no other thoughts than those habitual to it. It still remained a doubtful matter whether the question between George Fraser's owners and those of the vessel with which the American ship had come into collision could be settled without the interference of the law courts; and George, with the exception of a short absence in London for a day or two on

business connected with this difficulty, had been and still continued an inmate of Woodbine Cottage.

The works at the Castle had been commenced in earnest. For though all the preparatory plans and studies for every portion of the contemplated restorations and improvements had not been yet completed, the master conception of changing the situation of the grand staircase had been finally decided on; and both the baronet and his friend Mr. Farland had been eager to get to work on this capital part of the undertaking.

Lancaster was giving his best energies to the work, and was earning the warm approbation and admiration both of Artingale and Farlandstoke. An importunately haunting feeling would often come over him, that it was strange to be carrying on this work of restoration under the direction of those who might so soon be shown to have no interest in it. But the artistic feeling of the man prevented this from interfering with the zeal with which he pushed on the work. The creation of the beautiful, the noble, the picturesque, was in itself a delight to him. But the knowledge of what might so soon

break over them often made his intercourse with the ladies of the Castle very painful to him. There was something distressing in their perfect security.

He still felt it to be his duty to adhere religiously to the rule of conduct he had laid down for himself with respect to Mary Artingale. Had he possessed the certainty that she and hers were about to be hurled down from their high places, he would have had no hesitation in making the most of every opportunity which his position gave him for the winning of her affection. But he well knew that this was far from being the case. After all, it was but a guess, a possibility—a probability at the utmost. It might all be moonshine. George Fraser often seemed to wish that it might all turn out to be so. It might well be that Mary Artingale would continue to be the heiress of Artingale, placed by fortune as far out of his reach as any bright particular star in the heavens above him. And having this ever present to his mind, he had also ever present to it the absolute necessity of in no degree relaxing from the resolution which he had determined should in this matter be the rule of his conduct.

But it was very, very difficult. He was during all this time seeing Mary every day. There was, as sure as the day came, the daily “drawing lesson.” Assuredly, Mary had never before manifested so decided a vocation for artistic pursuits. She had become imbued with a vehement desire to do as well as little Bertha in that line, nay, if possible, to surpass her. She aspired even to be allowed to contribute at least one drawing to the projected work illustrative of the Castle. Then very frequently there were musical evenings in the little boudoir on the terrace, infinitely delightful to all the three parties mainly engaged in them, and which would have been manifestly impossible without the tenor voice. And sometimes Lady Lavinia would be persuaded to come down for the evening, and, together with Sir Hildebrand, play audience. Sir Hildebrand was especially great in this capacity. For he would sleep the sleep of the just through a long piece, and never failed to awake at its conclusion, and remark that the author of it was indeed a great composer.

Under these circumstances, how was it possible for a man to avoid “making love.” Making

love. To "do" or "make" the grammars and dictionaries say, bracketing the two verbs together as essentially and emphatically active in their signification. But a man may *make* love without any consciousness of active agency. Lancaster had determined not to make love to Mary Artingale. And heaven knows that he had been sincere in making, and brave in keeping, the resolution. Yet he was making love all day and every day—just as the earth is ever making the roses. If lovers would pull their love up by the roots every now and then, as children pull up their seedlings to see if they are growing (some lovers do so, with analogous results), there might be some chance that they would be able to keep the growth of the plant under. But if they plant it, and then take no further heed of it, simply determining to ignore and not to "make" it, they will find some fine morning (what a finest of all fine mornings!) that the earth and the air and the dews and the rains have been "making" the plant all the while, and that it has quietly grown to be such a plant that there can no longer be any question of pulling it up by the roots.

Short of taking himself bodily away from

Artingale and its neighbourhood, there was no possibility—and even so, no security—that he should cease to make love to Mary Artingale. And why did not he cause himself, or why did not some of the other parties concerned cause him to adopt this alternative?

For himself it was certainly very difficult. What motive to assign, in the first place. To have assigned the real one would have exposed him to observations which a man may well be excused if he shrink from encountering. Then it would have ruined his professional career. It would have grievously offended his most valued and valuable friend, Mr. Henningtree. It would have involved the renunciation of a work on which his whole artistic soul was set, which had grown to be very dear to him, and the abandonment of an opportunity on which he had come to rest his hope of name and fame. Nor would it have been easy to him to admit to himself that such a step was necessary. Should he, for the first time in his life, confess to himself that he was no longer master of his own will and his own conduct? Had it come to this with him, that his only mode of conquering a folly, the grossness of which, as he again and

again told himself it was impossible to exaggerate, was to run away from the cause of it? He would forfeit his own self-esteem if such were the case. No. Purcell's soul was still his own. He would stay and conquer!

Poor fellow! I should have talked the same balderdash "when George the Third was king." Would you have been much wiser at that same glorious epoch, my jolly, capon-lined pater-familias friend? I think not.

Then as to Miss Agnes. We have already seen the motives which had led her, on the whole, to determine not to interfere with the course of events and the solution of them which the fulness of time should bring forth. She attempted on one occasion, as we know—and she repeated the effort on three or four subsequent occasions—to open Mary's eyes to the suspicion that such a plant as has been above spoken of had, perchance, been planted in her heart, and to consideration of the consequences that must be expected to result from suffering it to grow. But she did not judge it to be wise to speak to her niece openly and directly upon the subject. Nor was she prepared to take upon herself the responsibility of active interference for the

crushing of her niece's heart, as she had crushed her own some twenty or five-and-twenty years ago.

Gradually, by the growth of her own mind in the main, but partly, also, by the progress of the world's mind around her, she had come to believe that she had then made a capital, a fatal, and an irrecoverable mistake. And the reflection probably had a tendency to make Aunt Agnes, the old maid, more tender towards all the romances of sentiment and the sweet morning blossoming of first love than many a happy mother, whose own course of true love had run smooth, might have been.

For these reasons, then, and moved by such feelings, Miss Agnes sat by and watched; taking good care, however, meanwhile, that “the government candidate,” Felix Farland, Esq., should have at least a fair field, if no favour. If he had it in him to win the day, why so much the better for all parties. The course should be kept open for him. Let him run and win. But this was all that Miss Agnes was disposed to do towards securing the success of “the government candidate.”

Then as for the baronet himself, it is difficult

to say or to imagine what would have been sufficient to open his eyes to the conception that his daughter, the heiress of Artingale, and young Purcell Lancaster, the Sillchester architect's young man, were falling in love with each other. Such a catastrophe was simply inconceivable to him. Had there been in the field any rival candidate for her hand, fitted to be so honoured, though not so fitted as the person fixed on by the family as the most proper husband for the heiress of the house; even in such case, Sir Hildebrand would never for an instant have doubted that a daughter of the house of Artingale would act as all the daughters of the race had ever been known to act—with a perfectly willing and cheerful submission to their duty, and to that which “Artingale expected of them.” But to suppose—bah! absurd! Tell him that the earth had turned about, and was going round the sun t’other way. He would a thousand times sooner have seen his child under the marble of her honoured tomb in the Artingale chapel than believe such a possibility of her.

Poor Lady Lavinia saw but little of what passed in the family; and was little in the habit

of meddling with, or taking any note of what she did see. What Mr. Hathaway would say to this or that new symptom the next time he called; whether, upon the whole, it would be better to revert to the light-pink acidulated draughts instead of those *fade*, sweet, light-brown, cinnamon-tasting ones that he had been sending lately—these were the real interests of life which sufficed to occupy her mind. She thought, from what she had seen of him, that Mr. Lancaster was a very respectable, proper-behaved young man; and that he had a very nice tenor voice, which really was quite a god-send to Agnes and Mary, and was pleasant enough to listen to when she was able to leave her room—for Lady Lavinia had a pretty taste in music—and further than this no thought about Purcell Lancaster had ever crossed her mind.

At Farlandstoke no suspicion of the mischief which was brewing had as yet been engendered. There, too, it would have needed much and strong evidence to induce Mr. Farland senior to believe in the probability that Mary Artingale should be so false to her blood as to dream of anything so “inconvenable” as any relation-

ship, save of the most distant character, between her and the young architect. Not that old Mr. Farland was incapable of perceiving that Purcell Lancaster was, in every sense of the word, save the purely technical feudal one, a gentleman, and a highly cultivated one to boot. Mr. Farland was not a man of bigoted prejudices in this respect, as may have been seen by the composition of the dinner-party at Farlandstoke, which has been recorded in a previous page. But looking at the matter with the mere business-like eye of a man of the world, the heiress of Artingale seemed so utterly and infinitely removed from the sphere of the young penniless architect, that such a notion as his dreaming of falling in love with her could with great difficulty have entered his mind. He looked at the matter—or rather would have looked at it, if the idea had been presented to his mind—much in the same light, indeed, as it had presented itself to Purcell himself. He, too, would never have dreamed of the possibility of his having the audacity or the folly to fall in love with Miss Artingale. But none the less that was just what he did.

Then as to Mr. Felix junior, he was not a

man to observe much of anything that he was not specially made to observe. His mind, as regarded Miss Artingale, was quite sufficiently filled with the rather alarming idea of the arduous duty imposed upon him of wooing and winning her himself. But on this somewhat up-hill task the possibility of there being a rival in the field was very far from occurring to him. He calmly pursued the path of what he believed to be his duty, in paying his addresses to Miss Artingale, and deemed that all was going on as well as could be expected in this respect. She was always very kind to him; never refused to ride with him and his father; and had adopted a friendly tone towards him, which had at length succeeded in putting him at his ease when in her company. He really believed that he was falling in love with her, slowly perhaps, but surely, and doubted not a similar ripening process was taking place with her.

But there were in the little world of Artingale, Billiford, and Farlandstoke, two persons who did perceive, or thought they perceived, reasons for thinking that the match between Artingale and Farlandstoke, which all the country side

expected, might, perchance, meet with unexpected impediments.

One of these was a person who had infinitely less means of observing the parties in question than any of those whose utter unsuspectingness has been spoken of. This was Miss Lucy Hathaway. Her opportunities were small; but her keenness of intelligence was considerable, and her interest in the game great.

Enough has been heretofore said to indicate that Lucy Hathaway occupied the position of village belle, or, in the language of that day, of "a reigning toast" at Billiford and its neighbourhood. Her reign, it is true, had been a rather long one; but she had not yet been deposed, and might still be said to reign. Though now five-and-twenty for thirty, she was still undeniably a very pretty girl, and clever, withal, with that sort of cleverness that knows how to manage the attractions to which it is allied, both physically and intellectually, in such sort as to make the most of them.

Now it had occurred—long since, to tell the truth—to Lucy Hathaway, that there need be no just cause or impediment why she, Lucy, and the heir of Farlandstoke should not be

joined together in holy matrimony. It is true that such a marriage for the daughter of the Billiford “General Practitioner” would be one of very great promotion. Lucy did not in the least delude herself on this subject. But she considered, perhaps rightly, that there were in the circumstances of the case many points in her favour. The disparity of the parties to the match would be great, certainly; though by no means so great to the eyes of the Billiford world as a marriage between Miss Artingale and one, for instance, in the position of Mr. Purcell Lancaster. Mr. Farland was, it is true, by far a richer man than Sir Hildebrand, and was well known to be so to all the country. Lucy also knew that the Farlands were as old if not an older race in Sillshire than the Artingales. But the same prestige did not attend the name. “The Castle,” little better than a ruin though much of it was, exercised a potent influence on the provincial imagination. The Farlands had always lived modestly, and on neighbourly terms with their neighbours. A great part—the greater part—of their wealth was known to have been derived from industrial pursuits, and not from Sillshire acres. And, in

a word, Farland of Farlandstoke was to the consciousness of the world of Billiford much more a being of the same clay with themselves, than Artingale of Artingale.

So much a being of the same clay, that Lucy Hathaway for her part saw no *insuperable* objection to such a match as has been spoken of. And there were other circumstances that seemed to lessen the difficulties in the way. Felix was not a man to go into the great world to look for a wife. He would be more likely to take one from among such as were near to him. Then again, he was, in the judgment of Lucy, one of those men who have to be married, rather than be left to marry somebody of their own initiative. If Felix had had a mother, Lucy's enterprise, as she told herself, would have been far more difficult. His mother would have chosen a wife for him, and married him to her. It would, probably, have been hopeless to attempt to take the matter out of her hands. But a father is a different thing. A father cannot manage a son in such a matter in the way a mother can. Felix would have to have the business of marrying him managed for him by some woman. And Lucy did not see any one

on whom the task could fall more properly than on herself.

All these views of the circumstances of the case tended to make the accomplishment of such a consummation as a marriage between herself and the heir of Farlandstoke, seem to Lucy a less Utopian hope than it might otherwise have appeared. But it cannot be denied, that when the project of an alliance between the two great houses of Artingale and Farlandstoke was understood to be on the tapis, it was felt and admitted by Lucy to herself to be a great blow and discouragement to her ambitious hopes. There was a natural and manifest fitness in the match between these two families in the persons of the respective only child of either of them, which seemed to exclude the likelihood of any other arrangement. But Lucy Hathaway was, as has been said, a very clever girl; and she knew Felix Farland well, and of Miss Mary Artingale had seen enough to enable her to form a shrewd appreciation of her character and of the sort of girl she was. And the result of this knowledge was to induce her to think that the game was not yet lost.

And now there came appearances in the

Billiford social sky which, to the keenness of Miss Lucy's vision, seemed to indicate a considerable probability that the battle might not be to the strong in this matter, even though the strength of the enemy consisted in the whole power and influence of all that went under the great name of Artingale.

“If I know anything of what's what in such matters,” thus Lucy reasoned the question to herself in her thoughts in the solitude of her secret bower on the first floor front of “Doctor” Hathaway's comfortable house, in the High Street of Billiford,—the substantial tenement with the large coloured lamp in front of it, and large brass plate on the oak-painted door—and Lucy had a very strong and not altogether unfounded opinion that she *did* know what was what in such matters—“if I know anything of what's what in such matters, that young Lancaster is falling in love with Miss Mary, and Miss Mary likes him. They little think that I know all that goes on in the Castle as well as if I was living in the midst of them. One is not the daughter of the Castle Doctor for nothing. I know she likes him. And nothing more likely. Lord! I can see it all. The wonder is,

others don't see it too; not the men—they are always as blind as beetles. But Miss Agnes. I do wonder she don't see what is going on. It is clear she don't, or Master Lancaster would have been sent back to Sillchester with a flea in his ear in no time. But it is just what I should have expected, for my part. Miss Artin-gale—I know her sort. Reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. Drawing and painting and singing and the piano-forte, and the rest of it. All the sort of things that this Sillchester chap can do (and small blame to him too—he has got his bread to earn)—and that our poor dear Felix can't do. I should like to put him on a horse, and put him and Felix side by side down in the water-meads when the Bill is out, and you would see the difference. But what is one man's meat is another man's poison. Women's similarly. If she thinks singing songs and painting pictures is what will make a good husband and a happy home, let her take it. For my part, I would rather have Felix than twenty such, even if there were no such place as Farlandstoke. And in saying this to herself Lucy was not *quite* truthful to herself, perhaps; but she told the truth as nearly

as people generally do when they talk to themselves.

There was, as has been said, one other person who had had eyes to see the truth of what was passing in the hearts of Mary Artingale and Purcell Lancaster. And this other was little Bertha at the cottage. She had not the slightest idea that she knew "what was what" in such matters. But it may be presumed, I think, that her own recent experience had done somewhat to render her, unconsciously, more capable of such insight. She saw Lancaster daily. She saw him and Mary together occasionally. For it had happened once or twice that she had come to the studio for some consultation respecting some of the drawings that were in progress for the projected work in illustration of the Castle, and had been there when Mary came with her sketch-books, as she had taken the regular habit of doing immediately after the Castle luncheon. More than once or twice, also, it had occurred that Lancaster and Miss Artingale had stood behind her together when she had been engaged in sketching a drawing she had commenced of the great hall and staircase as it at present existed, of which Lancaster was anxious that a memorial

should be preserved before it was all changed. Had Mary and Purcell been aware—had they confessed to themselves, and to each other—that they had a secret to keep, no doubt it would have been more difficult for Bertha, utterly undesirous as she was of surprising any secret at all, to have perceived the truth. Neither Purcell nor Mary dreamed, however, that there was anything in the manners, or tones, or looks of either of them, which could in the smallest degree betray the secret which each was conscious—he wholly, clearly, and avowedly to himself conscious; she not perhaps quite clearly nor avowedly to herself, but still now beginning to be awake to the consciousness—of having to bury in the deepest recesses of their own hearts. Each fancied that they spoke to the other exactly as courtesy and *bienseance* required persons in their respective relative positions to speak. But Bertha had a fine ear, and heard in tones what the utterers never intended to put into them. And she had an artist's eye, that could read in looks and glances what the owners of the tell-tale features would fain have kept out of them.

Little Bertha, then, had no doubt how things

were going with her two friends; and the perception of the truth alarmed her not a little. What could come of it other than misery? That such a marriage could be allowed was of course out of the question. Little Bertha was disposed to believe that it would be impossible, and probably contrary to the law of the land. But she could do nothing. She could only wait and watch, like a benevolent, but, alas! quite powerless little fairy, the concerns of these two poor mortals.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF JUNE AT ARTINGALE.

LITTLE BERTHA'S own matters had been progressing during the same period ; and it was clear that either proverbs are sometimes fallacious, or that the love which had been steadily growing up into a strong plant, with its roots deep down into the soil, between Bertha and George Fraser was not a true love. For the course of it had, to all appearances, been running during those summer days very smoothly. On that day, now more than a month ago—that day for ever memorable to her, when George, lingering behind his companions at the porch of the cottage, had whispered in her ear, before precipitately turning to run after them, that had he dared to say anything about her drawing when it had been taken up to the Farlandstoke break-

fast-table for judgment, he would have said that, pretty as were the drawings, the artist was in his eyes far prettier still, Bertha had thought that she could not mistake his meaning. His own character, as she read it, assured her that he could have but one meaning. Little as she had ever allowed her thoughts to dwell on such matters, little as ever it had occurred to her to think of herself as the object of any man's love, prone as she was by nature, and from her position, and from excess of retiring timidity, to think it little probable that wooers should come to her grandmother's cottage seeking her smiles, still she had felt at the moment convinced that George Fraser loved her. Looking at her circumstances, and at the relative position in which she and the young American sailor stood towards each other, it would have been an insult to have so spoken to her, had he not meant to convey an assurance of his love. And she held it to be wholly impossible that George Fraser should be guilty of offering such an insult to any girl.

She had, therefore, at the moment—as soon after his running away down the hill after the others, that is to say, as it was possible for her

to in any degree collect her thoughts, and calm the flutter at her heart, which almost took her breath away—at that moment she had admitted to her heart the conviction that George Fraser loved her. At that moment? Yes. But it is the property of such convictions born of, and based on some fact which has been almost instantaneous in the rapidity with which it is come and gone, to fade away as the fact which has given rise to them recedes into the past.

Mark the effect of a little lapse of time on the minds of those who believe that they have witnessed some phenomenon of the kind, usually described as supernatural. At first they are not only perfectly well convinced of the fact that such and such a thing has been experienced by them, but they give their entire and reasoned assent to all the speculative conclusions which may seem to them fairly deducible from the phenomena. But as time passes these mental conditions will almost inevitably become enfeebled. They do not feel equally certain of the reality of the things which they were before convinced they witnessed. They begin to feel doubts as to the accuracy of their first

impressions. Small circumstances, which at the time served in some way as corroborative evidence of the conclusiveness of the conclusions drawn, are forgotten. And a haze of uncertainty gathers round the recollection of facts which, at the time of their happening, seemed unmistakable.

And such had been the effect which the lapse of even a comparatively short time had produced on Bertha's mind with respect to those notable passages in the cottage porch, and the conclusions she had drawn from them. Bertha had gradually fallen away from her first faith in the unmistakability of those phenomena and the meaning to be gathered from them. This lapse on her part had been, moreover, further facilitated by the absence of any subsequent phenomena of a kind calculated to confirm the conclusions drawn from the first. We know whence the non-manifestation of the phenomena had arisen. We know that they had been prevented by the doubts and suspicions which had been engendered by that unlucky incident of the presence of the young lawyer, Hathaway, at the cottage—doubts and suspicions which had not so much been spontaneously produced in George Fraser's

mind at the moment by the sight of the lawyer at the cottage, as by the effect he had observed to be produced by the circumstance in the minds of others.

Bertha had been herself in some degree aware of this, or at least she had a consciousness that the untoward aspect of the circumstances in question were calculated to produce such a result. And to some such unavowed consciousness was probably due the permission given to Lancaster to communicate so much of Jonas Hathaway's secret as might serve to show that that gentleman's visit to the cottage had no reference to any phase of the tender passion in the bosom of either lady or gentleman.

George, as has been seen, was without difficulty convinced that he had no rival to fear in Mr. Jonas Hathaway, and had sought since that time sundry occasions of letting Bertha know the state of his own feelings, and endeavouring to ascertain what hope there was that hers might be in unison with them. Little Bertha's shrinking shyness made this rather a difficult task, and the difficulty was probably increased by her remembrance of the step which she had not been able to resist taking for the clearing

herself from the suspicion of having Mr. Jonas Hathaway for a lover. She had yielded to the temptation to do that, from the poignancy of the distress which the thought of such a suspicion caused her. But she took out the value of it, as it were, in increased reserve and timidity afterwards. Fraser had once or twice been tempted to think that it was all a mistake to suppose that she had any care for him. But he had persevered, and some progress had been made, enough to justify the assertion that the course of the loves of George and Bertha were running smoothly. But they were not running quite quickly enough to satisfy the sailor's impatience. He did not know when his residence under Captain Curling's hospitable roof might be brought to an end; and he had determined that all should be definitively settled between him and Bertha without further delay.

Now there was in those June days a notable rural merry-making about to take place. The summer was an early one. The weather was already sultry, and the flocks were beginning to pant under the too great weight of their winter covering. A great sheep-shearing was going to be done. It was the first of the year in those

parts, and it was to be made the occasion and the excuse for a sort of festival. Such things used to be commoner in those days than they are now. Merry-makings are not the fashion of our improved and desperately earnest times. Even child-like Italy is getting too old and too serious to be much amused by her old carnival doings. The broadcloth and silk and satin sections of society give and go to balls as much as ever. For flirting depends for its capabilities of amusing on certain proclivities of human nature, which the progress of civilization has not yet succeeded in abolishing. But the gay-coloured calico, and the witty false noses, and the merry comfit-pelting are sadly at a discount. Young Italy is getting too old for such delights.

The English world was already getting too old and business-like for such doings as long ago as when in the Stuart days Primate Laud tried to make the people young and merry by royal decree. Poor man ! it was not so clearly understood then that he might as well have attempted to make himself young by royal decree. We have found it out by this time ; and content ourselves as best we may with our long faces, without seeking to remedy them by

such means. But old usages and habits linger of course longest in far away country districts. And in many a shire of once merry England, jollifications which have now, in obedience to inevitable laws, fallen into desuetude, were in the order of the day at the beginning of this century.

On the 24th of June was to be a great sheep-shearing down in the valley of the Bill, in the water-meads at the bottom of the slope, the sides of which were occupied by Artingale Park. And the great annual Artingale sheep-shearing was in those days one of the great rural festivals of the year. If weather and season were favourable, the feast usually came off on the 24th of June. And Mr. Farland had a pet theory to show that this sheep-shearing ceremony was a last lingering remnant of the old solstitial festival of the Druidical worship, preserved through Christian times, as so much else was similarly preserved, under the sanctifying guise of St. John's Day.

But old Mr. Decimus Oblong was the leading spirit, the organizer and maintainer of the old custom. And I think that it fell into desuetude at Billiford when that patriarch had passed from the scene.

The Artingalesheep-shearing was a great affair, for all the sheep from the highland moors—all that hill country which made the blue southern horizon shutting in the view from the terrace of Artingale Castle—were brought down to it to be washed and sheared, and sent back to their moorland haunts lighter-clad and happier muttons.

There was a grand feast at night when the work was done—work indeed which the muscles of those who did it knew well by the end of the day to *be* work in earnest, and none of the lightest; but which was done very much in the spirit of play even by the labourers at it, and was regarded altogether as such by the lookers on. There was a grand feast for high and low, for rich and poor, for man, woman, and child, with giving of prizes—a very ceremonious and splendid affair, conducted by Mr. Decimus Oblong in person, and combining in that person the functions of judge of the lists, umpire, and queen of beauty,—prizes to the most expeditious washer, to the skilfullest shearer, and to the most successful herd. The neighbouring farmers used to supply the food for the rustic population, with the exception of four fat sheep given from

time immemorial by the lord of Artingale, who also gave that most indispensable part of the entertainment, the strong beer. Mr. Farland used to erect two large marquees for the upper thousand of Billiford, destined to serve, one the purpose of a banqueting hall, and one that of a ball room. And all that was needed for the due furnishing of this part of the feast was supplied from Farlandstoke.

And very nearly every man, woman, and child in the parish of Artingale, and a very large part of the population of Billiford, eat and drank and made merry—those who wore broadcloth in the Farlandstoke marquees, and those who wore corduroy or smock frocks, at the tables spread out in the meadow, mowed for the occasion, on the bank of the stream. The marquees for the local aristocracy were pitched upon a little piece of fortuitously level sward, situated on the instep, as it were, of the slope that shut in the valley, at a spot where the stream ran on that side very near the commencement of the rising ground. The preparations for the commonalty were on the side of the stream just below this spot.

Now it was on the opportunity afforded by

this festival, that George Fraser had determined to speak the word in earnest, that must be answered by a similarly earnest word from Bertha, and settle the colour and the happiness of his future life.

Bertha was to be taken to the scene of the merry-making by Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale, as had been the case in two or three former years. Old Hannah was too old to leave her cottage on such an errand, and was well cared for at her own fireside ; and Bertha was thus enabled to join the revellers above the rustic salt, which social etiquette would hardly otherwise have permitted her to do. . It was evident enough to everybody, without any question about it, that she, Bertha, was in her proper place among the Lucy Hathaways and other such-like rank and fashion of Billiford, and that she would have been out of place among the labourers and their wives and sweethearts in the meadow below. But the Billiford aristocracy would not have liked to have the old menial servant among them. And this, as a hundred other similar difficulties, was one of the misfortunes of Bertha's anomalous social position. But as the old woman stayed at home,

and Bertha was brought in the suite of the ladies from the Castle, the difficulty was in that case got over.

Every summer, for the last three or four years, this sheep-shearing festival had been made the opportunity and the excuse for the present of a new dress to Bertha from Miss Agnes. It was Miss Agnes' own present, purchased out of that lady's own proper peculium. There were two or three other girls in the neighbourhood in such poor circumstances as to make such a present a most welcome benefaction, to whom Miss Agnes was in the habit of doing a similar kindness. It was a favourite mode of well-doing with her. She used to say that the suffering caused by a little extra raggedness to those who were accustomed to be ragged was as nothing compared to the pain and mortification of those whose position made it at once imperative on them, and at the same time nearly impossible for them to make a decent appearance.

Now Miss Agnes was minded that her little *protégée* should on the present occasion make something more than a decent appearance. The ladies at the Castle had been kept well informed by Lancaster of the progress of George

Fraser's courtship. Miss Agnes had been quite convinced that whatever might have been the causes of Mr. Jonas Hathaway's mysterious visit to and yet more mysterious departure from the cottage, they were not of a nature to throw any discredit or blame on little Bertha. She had quite taken her into favour again, and took a lively interest in George Fraser's love-making. So Miss Agnes was resolved that Bertha should look especially nice on the coming occasion of the great sheep-shearing festival.

"Boots from the Arms, if you please, ma'am, with a parcel from Sillchester by the Hero," said Richard, one evening, as the ladies at the Castle were sitting at their tea; while Lancaster, who was going to try over Webbe's "Swiftly from the mountain's brow" with the ladies, as soon as the tea-things had been taken away, was in the meantime giving an account to Sir Hildebrand of what progress had been made that day in the work in hand.

"It must be the dress for Bertha, aunt," exclaimed Mary.

"I suppose so," said Miss Agnes. "Bring the parcel in, Richard. And let Boots have a glass of ale."

“Now we shall see what Smithers and Bowles have sent you. I hope it is pretty,” said Mary, while her aunt, having taken a pair of scissors from her pocket, proceeded to cut the string of the parcel; and in another minute the spiriting of Messrs. Smithers and Bowles was revealed. It was a very bright-looking muslin dress, with a dainty and very pretty chintz-like pattern of light blue convolvulus, from between the folds of which, as it was unfolded for admiration, fell a store of beautiful bright blue ribbons for trimming, and for tying up the “bonny brown hair.”

“Well done, Smithers and Bowles!” said Mary; “it is as pretty a dress as one could wish to see or to wear on a summer’s day. But, dear aunt, is it not a rather unthrifty present for poor little Bertha? You always used to give her something durable and useful. But—all that’s light must wear, and muslin still the fleetest.”

“Dear me! the young folks are getting so prudent and so wise,” returned her aunt. “I wanted Bertha to look her best on the 24th, and did not think about afterwards. Her husband must find her dresses afterwards. Is not

that right, Mr. Lancaster? And don't you think Bertha will look pretty in that dress?"

"Quite right, Miss Agnes. I think the policy of your strategy against the enemy most masterly. And if that sylph-like costume does not bring Master George to strike his colours, he must be invincible," said Lancaster, the tone and manner of whose reply may serve to indicate to the reader that, putting aside all love-making, whether conscious or unconscious, between him and Mary, a considerable intimacy had been permitted to spring up between him and the family at the Castle generally.

"I think it will become her," said Miss Agnes, holding out a portion of the material at arm's length, and looking at it with her head on one side. "We will take it down to the cottage to-morrow, Mary. Please do not say anything to Bertha, Mr. Lancaster. Let us have the pleasure of surprising her."

"I will be discretion itself," said Lancaster.

It was the 19th of June on which this little scene took place; and the remaining time before the festival was somewhat short for the preparation of the dress by the limited resources of Billiford. For Messrs. Smithers and Bowles

had made Miss Agnes wait for her parcel somewhat longer than she had reckoned on. Weighing these facts in her mind, Miss Agnes told Richard, when he came to take the tea-things away, to send the groom over to Billiford that night, to desire Miss Shadbolt the milliner to meet her at old Hannah's cottage at ten o'clock the next morning.

"By that means, my dear, we shall lose no time," said Miss Agnes to her niece; "and indeed we have none to lose."

And then the two ladies and Lancaster went to work at "Swiftly from the mountain's brow;" and Sir Hildebrand shortly yielded to the influence of the "great composer," and went to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

MR. GARSTANG OF GARSTANG GRANGE.

THE much-expected 24th arrived, and was as lovely a summer's day as any holiday-makers could wish for their festival. And not only did the sun make his appearance punctually on the fateful morning, but, what was to those in whom we are especially interested yet more important, Miss Shadbolt was punctual also; and before eight o'clock A.M., the new muslin dress had been tried on at the cottage and pronounced a perfect fit. It was then carefully laid out in Bertha's little room over the sacred Sunday parlour, while she despatched all her household duties, including the giving of very careful instructions to the servant girl sent from the Castle to take care of old Hannah, to be resumed at two o'clock, in readiness for the

ladies, who had promised to call for her after the Castle luncheon on their way to the sheep-shearing.

Bertha felt very nervous as the hour approached, and she was angry with herself for feeling so. Not but that she was always nervous on similar, or indeed on any occasion. But she could not avoid owning to herself that she was more so to-day than usual. And why? It was a home question; but Bertha had a habit of putting home questions to herself. Why was she feeling unusually fluttered and nervous at the thoughts of joining in the coming festival to-day? The answer was inevitable. It was because she was going to meet George Fraser; and—it is not to be denied that this also entered into her meditations, and helped to flutter her—was going to meet his eyes adorned more elegantly and becomingly than he had ever before seen her.

She had a kind of presentiment that he would say something to her that day—something which would require her to make a definite and suitable reply to it. And at the thought she felt as if she would prefer to run away and hide herself in the loneliest part of

Artingale great coppice, rather than go to the festival. If George did—if he were to—speak to her, what should she say to him? How would it be possible for her to speak? Her tongue would cleave to the roof of her mouth. She hoped that he would not do anything of the sort. And then as soon as the thought had flashed through her brain, she began to ask herself if that were indeed true. Was it really the truth that she should be better pleased and happier if she knew that George Fraser would never say anything to her of the kind she had been thinking of? She knew in her inmost heart that such a knowledge would have the power to make all her future life seem desolate—that it would for her extinguish the sun in the sky. But she hoped that he would not say anything that day. Yes; she really did hope that. Not that very day in the midst, too, of all the people. She felt that she would make a fool of herself if he did.

But would he? Was it not all nonsense? Who could tell whether he had any such ideas in his head? And Bertha in the solitude of her own room became crimson at the thought that for aught she knew while such fancies had

been running through her head, he perhaps had never given her a serious thought. But then a secret little voice, speaking in a very confidential whisper down at the very bottom of her heart, assured her that this was not so, that the real truth was that she *knew*—how she could not explain satisfactorily—but that she *knew* that Fraser loved her.

So, amid much trepidation and many fluctuations of spirit between hope and fear and wishing and dreading, the pretty dress with the bright blue convolvulus pattern was put on—the ribbons were artistically arranged around the small Greek-shaped head, with its glossy curls of bright brown hair—the dainty little feet, which the present mode, so dear to those whose extremities are neither small nor dainty, had not yet come to hide, were neatly clad in fine snow-white cotton stockings and well-fitting black leathern slippers—and at two o'clock punctually Bertha was ready for her kind friends when they shall call at the cottage for her.

They were pretty nearly as punctual as Bertha was. Within ten minutes of two o'clock by the bell in Artingale steeple, Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale came down the little path

leading to the cottage from the Castle, attended by Lancaster, who had been assured by each and every member of the family at the Castle that it was quite out of the question that he or anybody else should think of attending to their ordinary avocations on the 24th of June at Artingale, and that he, like all the rest of the world, must be that afternoon in the water-meads below the Castle.

Bertha met them at the porch of the cottage, having already said her last words to her grandmother and to the little servant who was to attend her; and the four set forth at once for the trysting-place, beginning their way thither by the little path from the cottage to the church, which has been already so often mentioned. The path was narrow. It was necessary to walk two-and-two. And the *partie carrée* arranged themselves, apparently as naturally as possible, into two pairs, Miss Agnes and little Bertha preceding, and Mary and Mr. Lancaster following. They fell into that arrangement simply because it seemed to suit all parties, and wholly without malice aforethought. Had Lancaster given a thought to the matter, he might probably have chosen to

avoid it, in pursuance of his stern resolution not to fall into the snare of making love to Mary Artingale.

“I must say, child, that I think Miss Shadbolt has surpassed herself this time,” said Miss Agnes to her companion. “If you are one of the prettiest-dressed girls in the ball-marquee to-day, as I expect you will be, I shall claim but a small share of the merit. A good fit is everything.”

“But the fit and all I have to thank you for, Miss Agnes. It really is a lovely dress. I am so much obliged by your great kindness,” said little Bertha.

“More than you would ever have been for an equally pretty dress before, little Bertha, eh? Is not that so? Does not an old woman show that she knows something of such matters—or has known once upon a time—when she guesses that never before did you care so much to look your best?” said Miss Agnes.

Bertha felt one great hot glow all over her from her hair to her feet. She bent not only her eyes but her head towards the ground, and muttered some unintelligible sounds by way of reply.

“ Well, my dear child, I won’t tease you by any further allusions to certain reports which have reached my ears. But my object in referring to the subject at all was to make an opportunity for saying one or two serious words to you. Will you listen to me ?”

“ Yes, Miss Agnes, with all my attention,” said Bertha, whom this preface had made as cold all over as the little previous word of bantering had made her hot.

“ I will say, then, what I want to say as plainly and shortly as possible. You know that you may trust my real desire for your welfare. If ever—without making any special allusions, you know—but if ever any good man, whom you felt that you could love, should ask you to be his wife, and if the circumstances of the case were such, as should make a separation between you and your grandmother inevitable in case you accepted his offer, it would in that case be your duty—your *duty* observe, Bertha—to leave all and follow him who was to be your husband. Cases of divided duty are always painful. And tender consciences are apt to jump too quickly to the conclusion that most duty must needs lie on the side on which there

is most self-sacrifice. But that is not necessarily nor always the case. It would not be so in the case we are imagining. Your *duty* would be to do as I have told you. As I have said, divided duties are always painful. But in the case in hand, the pain of following the path I prescribe to you would be lessened by the certainty you would have that your grandmother would be well cared for. You might—you may, if by chance the case should ever arise—rely on the promise I now give you that we at Artingale would charge ourselves with seeing that Hannah was properly attended to. That is all I wanted to say.”

“You are very, very kind to me,” murmured Bertha, scarcely audibly.

“And you will think of the advice I have given you? Believe me, it is well founded.”

“Yes, Miss Agnes,” whispered Bertha, yet more inaudibly.

Meanwhile the conversation between the other couple, who had fallen somewhat to the rear, was not proceeding as briskly as might have been supposed by any one who marked the excellence of the opportunity for it. Lancaster did not seem to be in the mood for lively talk.

"How pretty our little Bertha looks in her new dress! Do not you think so, Mr. Lancaster?" began Mary.

"Yes, indeed; she is always pretty. And the new dress is very becoming to her."

"I hope it will seem so to Mr. Fraser. If he is not definitively conquered, and do not profess himself so to day, I shall begin to think that he is invulnerable, and has never had any serious thought of little Bertha."

"That would be a mistake, I assure you, Miss Artingale. I am quite sure that Fraser not only has thought seriously of Miss Donne, but loves her most truly. But does it quite follow from that that he is sure to tell her so?" said Lancaster, with some sadness in his manner.

"Yes; I suppose so. He cannot expect that she will tell him so. That is not American fashion, is it, Mr. Lancaster?"

"I presume not, Miss Artingale. But are there not cases in which a man may be prevented from telling his love by other circumstances than the fact of not feeling it; cases in which he may feel that, let him love as truly, as deeply as he may, he must not speak of love to the object of it; cases in which he cannot—

ought not—dare not?” said Lancaster, speaking with what would have seemed, to any observant bystander, a degree of earnestness and warmth rather more than the nature of the occasion needed.

Possibly some perception of the kind struck Mary’s ear too. At all events, she paused before replying, just long enough to have caused a suspicion in the mind of such supposed bystander that, at least for a moment, it seemed possible to her that the words might be intended to convey some more special meaning than that which lay on the surface of them. At the end of that moment, however, she answered with perfect apparent innocence and simplicity (whether wholly guileless or not, who shall say?).

“Ah! you are thinking of the grandmother. You mean that Mr. Fraser may have scruples about asking her to leave the old woman. But I think that would be wrong. We have been speaking of that, Aunt Agnes and I; and I believe aunt means to tell Bertha that if it should happen that an eligible proposal were made to her, it would not be her duty to reject it on that ground; the more that she might

depend upon us at the Castle for having old Hannah well looked after."

"It is very kind of you to say so. And I am quite sure that the promise will at least excite George Fraser's gratitude," replied Lancaster; "whether Miss Bertha will be equally grateful, as she ought to be, I cannot pretend to know. For who can tell what a girl's sentiments may be?"

"Very often, I should think, not she herself," said Mary.

And then descending by a path, that found its way down the side of the valley, zigzagging between the firs and the beeches, and as it neared the bottom among the birches, they came in sight of the flat bit of meadow on which the two gay Farlandstoke marquees were pitched, and of the bustling scene on the bank of the stream a little below.

Just at the turn of the path which brought them within sight of this scene they met a man—or rather, it would be more correct to say, fell in with him; for he was loitering so as to make it doubtful whether he were going towards the tents or coming from them—who stepped aside to allow them space to pass. Miss Agnes

was leaning on Bertha's arm, for the descent just there was sufficiently steep to make such slight aid in steadying her steps desirable; and she felt a sudden little movement in the arm she held, which showed that Bertha was unpleasantly startled.

"Who is that?" said Miss Agnes, in a low voice; for they were within a few paces of the individual in question.

"It is Mr. Garstang of Garstang Grange," said Bertha, in the same tone.

Almost at the same time the man pulled off his hat, and bowed, and made a movement as if he would have come forward to speak to them, but changed his mind and fell back for them to pass. He was a very singular-looking man, especially so to meet in such a place and upon such an occasion. To meet a farmer of the neighbourhood there on the occasion in question was just what might have been expected. And Mr. Garstang of Garstang Grange was a small proprietor and large farmer of the neighbourhood. But he was far from looking the character. In the first place, his dress was in some degree remarkable, sufficiently so, without being anything very strange, to make him look totally

unlike all the farmers of the country side. It had a dash of melodramatic effect about it, too. He wore a complete suit of black velveteen, and, instead of the ordinary top-boots, which were in those days the universal costume of a well-to-do farmer, long black riding-boots without any "top." Then instead of the usual farmer's hat of the period and of the locality—a low-crowned, broad-brimmed beaver—he wore a soft, black, conical felt hat, much as may be seen on the heads of Italians, or of English holiday-tourists in these more emancipated days of free hat-ticulture. He was a tall, handsome man withal, and, dressed as has been described, made a not unpicturesque figure.

The expression of his face, however, was the most remarkable thing about him. That, also, was handsome, singularly handsome, indeed, but without being pleasing. It was the type of face which in England is generally considered, very erroneously, to be characteristic of the Italian race—long-visaged, large-eyed, prominent-nosed, sallow, high-browed, and very dark; black brow, black hair, worn rather long, and blue-black, strong, hard-lined, firm chin and upper lip, from which the black beard had

been cleanly shaven. All this, it will be admitted, made a handsome face. But there was an expression about it half-sinister, half-sad, and wholly wild-looking, which repelled rather than attracted.

He bowed, and the ladies returned his salutation slightly as they passed.

“Do you know that man, Bertha?” said Miss Agnes, as soon as they were out of earshot of him; for he remained standing in the path at the point where they had encountered him.

“Yes, Miss Agnes. He is Mr. Garstang of Garstang Grange.”

“So you said, child, before. And I know the name, and who he is, though I am not aware that I ever saw him before. But I asked you if you knew him—personally, I mean? For you seemed to start at the sight of him, and he moved as if he had half a mind to come up and speak to you. A very singular-looking man,” said Miss Agnes, with some curiosity.

“I have frequently seen him, when grandmother has sent me over to her cousin at Billmouth. He made acquaintance with me in their house. And—and he has found occasion

to speak to me several times since," said Bertha, speaking very reluctantly.

"And may I ask what he spoke to you about?" continued Miss Agnes. "I do not half like the look of the man," she added, looking back, as if to assure herself that the object of her animadversion was not following them. But he remained standing still where they had passed him.

"My cousin—that is, grandmother's cousin—told me that he was a very good man and a gentleman; but I did not like him at all. He frightened me," replied Bertha, somewhat evasively.

"But what was it that he found opportunity to say to you, little Bertha?" persisted Miss Agnes, adding, when Bertha hung down her head, and made no reply, "Am I to understand, child, that he made love to you?"

"He asked me once," said Bertha, thus pressed, and evidently speaking with much distress, "he asked me to marry him, Miss Agnes; but indeed, indeed, it was not my fault!"

"Your fault, child! why, think of your having had an offer from Mr. Garstang of Garstang

Grange, and nobody ever knowing anything about it."

"And please Miss Agnes I hope you will not ever say anything about it. I told you, because you have always been so kind to me, and because I could not answer you falsely. But I should like nothing to be ever said about it, please, Miss Agnes," pleaded Bertha.

"And you refused his offer then, I presume," said Miss Agnes, looking at her crimson shrinking face.

"I told him I could not marry him, and begged him never to ask me again. But he said he should, and he did. And I am very much afraid he will ask me again to-day. He was always very civil; but he frightens me, and looks at me so strangely."

"Look strangely, indeed! I think I never saw such a singular and disagreeable-looking man. But I do not think that you need be frightened at him to-day, in the midst of us all here—even if there was nobody here who was specially interested in not letting you be carried off by that aquiline-looking black gentleman," said Miss Agnes.

"I hope he does not mean to say anything

to me to-day," said Bertha, in a tone which very clearly showed how much and how sincerely she really did hope it.

And in the next minute they reached the ground on which the marquees were pitched.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE WATER-MEADS.

THE scene which presented itself to the little party of four as they emerged from the birch and willow fringed path on to the open meadow ground was a very pretty one. It was not new to the three ladies of the party, being a very accurate repetition of the old annual festival, which they had all three of them so often witnessed. To Purcell Lancaster, however, it was a new experience. The marquees, gay with many-coloured streamers, were pitched close beside each other at the further edge of the small extent of level meadow ground which has been mentioned, just at the top of the slope, that is to say, at the bottom of which, so near as to be within shouting distance, was the spot which had been selected for the work of the day.

The water in which the sheep were to be washed before undergoing the process of shearing was not a part of the main stream of the little river. There would hardly have been found in it sufficient depth for the purpose. But the meadows, which constituted the bottom of the valley, were, as has been said, water-meadows; being entitled to that appellation by virtue of a well-organized system of irrigation, for which the stream of the Bill supplied the necessary element.

Those who have ever traversed a district of water-meadows, or “water-meads,” a pretty form of the term still much in use in the southern counties, are aware that the regular irrigation required for the purposes of the farmer cannot be produced by simply cutting a number of channels for the purpose of conducting the water to every part of them. It is necessary that the flow of this should be regulated at pleasure by an extensive system of sluices and locks of larger or smaller dimensions: some merely removable and replaceable by the hand, some requiring the simple machinery of a crow used as a lever, and a few so large as to need the more complex apparatus of a cog-wheel and winch. An infi-

nite number and variety of holes and basins is thus produced of every sort of dimension and depth, from the clear little minnow-haunted pool of green water in its nest of bright water-weeds, plainly visible at the bottom of its some two or three feet of depth, to the miniature lakelet of six or eight feet deep, and as much in diameter, the equally clear but darker water of which is the favourite home of the trout.

These water-mead districts have always a peculiar beauty and picturesqueness altogether their own, and as far as my experience has gone, intensely and exclusively English. Extensive systems of irrigation, as we all know, more extensive, indeed, and more scientifically devised than anything we have in England, may be found in Holland and in Lombardy, and perhaps elsewhere. But though these latter are not without a beauty of their own, the character of them is very different from that of the scene I have tried to describe. The various water-mead systems of the southern English counties are for the most part of comparatively small extent; and the construction of the various contrivances for the distribution and regulation of the water is generally

rude, and not in the best possible order. Hence the beauty of them in the general landscape. The timbers of a sluice, new, in thoroughly good condition, well painted or tarred, have nothing specially picturesque about them. Economic science likes sharp angles of well tarred wood-work, accurately fitting into the places intended for it, and successfully doing the work for which it was planned. But the eye of the lover of the picturesque prefers timbers ashy grey with the action of time and weather, mottled with lichens and mosses of every hue, from stone grey to grassy green—loves the imperfections, which throw each vertical and horizontal line out of its correct rectangular position, and fail to confine every little gushing streamlet.

Beauty, wise people tell us, consists in the perfect adaptability and fitness of anything for the purpose for which it was designed and created. How is it, then, that in so many cases decay and manifest cessation of adaptability to original purpose makes beautiful that which when in perfect order and useful state of repair had no beauty? May this perhaps be accounted for, without upsetting the theory, which apparently with such good sense connects beauty

with the promise of utility, by admitting in nature's designs, intentions, and adaptabilities, a power and a tendency to override and obliterate the designs, intentions, and adaptabilities of the works of men's hands? What admirably constructed palaces do the decaying timbers of this time-worn sluice afford to the happy water-rat. Could any better instance of perfect adaptation to all his wants and comforts be found? How excellently do these runlets, half obstructed by the growth of water-weeds, serve the purposes and wants of the trout? How thoroughly comfortable a home, pasture-fields, and happy-hunting-ground, all in one, do the half-rotten beams of this old lock afford to thousands of various races of nature's pensioners. How absolutely necessary is the still further decay of all these things for the production of the materials for the future growth of other forms, and other life. And man's eye and mind have been so constituted as to see beauty in every stage of the process.

Theory, however, or no theory—a range of water-meads, with all the appliances thereof somewhat the worse for wear, is a much prettier thing, in a picturesque point of view, than the

same scene would be if all were in perfect order. The water-controlling apparatus of the water-meads in the valley of the Bill were as much out of order as the most devoted admirer of the picturesque could wish ; and the scene was in truth a very pretty one.

The place chosen for the business in hand—or, more accurately, for the first of the three businesses in hand, viz., the washing, shearing, and subsequent marking of the sheep—was one of the larger pools, but not one of the deepest of its kind. The depth of water desirable for the purpose is not more than about four feet ; so that men standing in it would not be quite up to their arm-pits in the water. It was further fitted for the purpose, by being furnished with a sluice at either end of it ; so that the water could readily be renewed at pleasure ; a renovation more frequently desirable than those might suppose who have never been present at a sheep-washing. On the bank of the stream, some half-dozen paces or so farther down the valley, were established the shearers ; and again, a little further in the same direction, was an enclosure of wattled hurdles, into which a lane, similarly formed, led from where the

shearers were at work. At the spot where this lane opened into the enclosure, the markers, with their pots of ruddle and marking-irons, stood, and seized each sheep as he came, divested of his winter coat, and stamped him, before he was allowed to trot with a surprised air into the enclosure, and there compare notes with his acquaintances as to the extraordinary experiences which they had gone through. A similar enclosure of hurdles, a little above the washing place, was filled by the heavy-coated and dirty denizens of the moors awaiting the operations of the toilette.

And all this was just in front of and a little below the little bit of flat and dry meadow ground, near the bottom of the slope of the hill, on which the marquees destined for the accommodation of the rank and fashion of Billiford and its neighbourhood—the grand stand, as it were—were situated.

The rank and fashion in question had already assembled in considerable numbers when the party from the Castle reached the ground. Some were loitering in and around the marquees, inspecting the arrangements made for the amusements of the evening, with an interest

concentrated in some cases on the banqueting-hall marquee, and in others, on the ball-room marquee, according to the stage in life's journey which the observer had reached. Some were sitting on the turf at the edge of the flat space of meadow ground, and thus looking down at the operations going on a few yards below them. But the greater number were gathered more immediately around the main centres of the interest of the day. And of these, the washers seemed to constitute the greatest attraction, and the principal focus of noise, laughter, and merriment.

Among those who were sitting at the edge of the marquee ground were Felix and Miss Hathaway. Lucy knew very well that she should have to give up her hold on the heir of Farlandstoke as soon as the Artingale party appeared on the ground. But that was no reason whatever why she should not make hay as long as the sun of her opportunity shone. And she did so assiduously, and with so much of the success that assiduity generally commands, that she was pretty sure, when the Artingale ladies did arrive, and Felix felt it to be his bounden duty to spring from the grass at

Lucy's side, and go to meet them, that he would rather have remained where he was, had he consulted nothing save his own inclinations.

"There are the Artingales," he said; "I *must* go and speak to them." (Lucy was sure that her ear detected a decided emphasis on the "must.") "Remember, we are to dance Sir Roger de Coverley together."

"I won't forget, Mr. Farland, if you don't," said Lucy, as she too got up from the turf, and strolled down to the water's edge, to see the fun that was going on at the washing place.

"There's that young Lancaster with them, as usual," she said to herself, as she turned away down the slope; "the blindness of some people is really incredible. It passes all that one could believe. To think that that old maid can't see that those two are falling in love with each other just as fast as they can do it. And Felix, he's as blind as a bat, too. But then he's a man. I'd make a bet that she refuses him. And then, if he's got a spark of—well, we shall see."

And Lucy went to dispense some of those smiles that have power to make the world seem sweet, to a young farmer, who was looking on at the sheep-washing.

George Fraser was standing by the side of the young man referred to, and Lucy said, as she came up to the group, "Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale have just come, Mr. Fraser ; and Miss Donne from the cottage is with them."

"Thank you, Miss Hathaway, for telling me," said George, with all simplicity, and at once bounded up the bank to join the party from the Castle.

Felix Farland had walked across the little marquee ground to meet the ladies at a much more sober pace. So that he and Fraser, bounding across the ground, came up to them as nearly as might be at the same moment. The latter, taking off his hat with an action very much as if he were going to give a three times three cheer, bowed low to Miss Agnes and her niece, and then turned to whisper his petition for the first dance, and probably for one or two other little matters, in Bertha's ear. Felix also made his salutations, in a manner somewhat more in accordance with the usual habits of English gentlemen, and without any attempt at a whisper hoped that he might have the honour of dancing the first quadrille with Miss Artingale.

Mary blushed as she told him that she was engaged for the first dance, but should be most happy to dance the second with him if he were not engaged.

"But we have a great deal to do before that comes," said she; "Mr. Farland would by no means be contented if we did not do justice to the Farlandstoke hospitality. You must take care of us, Mr. Felix; and you had better join us at dinner time, too, Mr. Fraser, or else I know some of us will not like our dinner."

"I'll be sure to take care of you," said honest, literal-minded Felix. "There will be such a crowd that there will be need of some care-taking. But there is enough for all, if they will have patience."

"But I shall want a great a deal for my share, Mr. Felix, for I am dreadfully hungry," said Mary, who could not resist the temptation of trotting out his uncomprehending simplicity.

"Never fear, Miss Artingale," he said; "I'll see that you have plenty, and of the best. Let me alone for that."

"And can it be," thought Lancaster to himself, "that she is going to marry that man?"

Meanwhile they were all strolling on towards

the edge of the meadow and the thicker part of the crowd. Felix had offered his arm to Miss Artingale, and it was impossible for her to refuse it. Fraser had similarly taken possession of Bertha, and Miss Agnes thus fell to the share of Lancaster. When they came, making their way amid multifarious greetings on all sides, to the spot from which they could look down on the crowd, and the men at work, and the sheep below, there was a great noise of shouting and laughter coming up from the group around the washing place. It was evident that that was for the nonce the centre of the fun. And the gentlemen urged the ladies to venture down the slope into the thick of the throng, to enjoy the humour of the scene. Miss Agnes thought the slope rather too steep for her, and told Lancaster that if he would not mind accompanying her for a short distance along the edge of the upper level on which they were, she would show him a more easy path down to the level of the stream. The direction in which the path she spoke of was situated was down the valley, or towards the Castle, the water-meads and the whole of that part of the valley of the Bill forming the centre of the landscape commanded from the

Castle terrace. And accordingly Miss Agnes and Lancaster turned away northwards to find the path in question.

Mary, who could without the slightest difficulty or hesitation have skipped down the bank with the sure-footed security of a mountain goat, permitted Felix to hand her down, which he did with a triumphant consciousness that now at last he was indeed making love to Mary Artin-gale in earnest.

Bertha was thus left for the moment with George Fraser, and he seized the opportunity to lead her a little aside from the direct line of descent, which Mary and Felix had taken, meaning to arrive at the same point by a little *détour* in the opposite direction to that in which Miss Agnes and Lancaster had gone. He could not assert that he thus led her for the sake of finding, after the example of Miss Agnes and her cavalier, an easier descent to the bottom of the slope, for the hill-side became steeper in that direction of the valley. He did not think it necessary, however, to make any excuse at all. Nor did Bertha think of demanding why she was so led.

There was no crowd in that direction,

probably because the bank was there steeper, and the going up and down between the stream and the tents somewhat less easy. The whole of the little plot of level ground around the marquees was filled with groups of people. The whole scene of operations on the bank of the stream was also crowded. And many of the younger portion of the company kept running up and down the bank between the two centres of attraction. Nor was the path in the direction of the Castle, by which Miss Agnes and Lancaster had gone, altogether deserted. For others of the elders of the assemblage were sauntering that way, moved by the same consideration probably that had induced Miss Agnes to adopt it. But the other side of the little meadow beyond the marquees was very sparsely occupied; and beyond its limits, where there was no more level ground, but only the bank, in that part, as has been said, very steep, and more thickly set with trees than elsewhere, there was not a soul. So that Fraser, as soon as he had got Bertha among the trees there had as good an opportunity as could be wished for saying all he had to say to her. The steepness of the bank, where they began to descend it,

really did require some little assistance; but Fraser would have preferred that there should have been no such interruption to the flow of his eloquence. For it seemed as if all of it that he could summon to his aid were needed. It seemed impossible to get a word—or at all events such a word as he wished to hear—from little Bertha. Of course any third person, any man, woman, or child, except the man in love with her, would have had no difficulty in perceiving what Bertha's sentiments on the matter were. But what with her nervous timidity and shyness, and what with the difficulties of the path they were engaged in, the one little word which George was striving to obtain from her was still unspoken, when a sudden cry from the stream towards which they were descending startled them.

It was evidently the cry of a child in distress and terror; and in the next instant Fraser's practised eye had detected the cause of the outcry. A child had fallen into the water. Now the streams that run through water-meads, small and safely to be played with as they seem, are often treacherously dangerous to children, and in some cases even to men, if they are not

swimmers. The action of the water, put into artificial motion by sluices and water-gates, hollows out deep holes, often scooped far under the over-hanging bank; and the opening of a sluice at a considerable distance frequently occasions currents and under-drafts powerful enough in the larger arteries of the net-work of water-channels to be dangerous. The place where the child had fallen in was some little distance above the spot where the sheep were being washed; and the noise of laughing and shouting going on there was so great as effectually to prevent any of the crowd there from becoming aware of the accident.

“There’s a child in the water!” cried Fraser; “he may be drowned before any of them see what has happened. Stay where you are a minute, Miss Donne. Don’t try to come down by yourself. I will be back in a minute.”

And George, without waiting for a reply, dashed down the bank, and rushed to the water’s edge. He saw the nature of the accident in a moment. The margin of the stream had been undermined and rendered treacherous by the action of the current. A fragment of turf had broken beneath the feet of the child; and it

had fallen into one of those deep holes which have been described. But at the moment of his reaching the bank no child was to be seen. He cast one rapid glance down the stream, saw nothing, and without waiting even to pull off his coat—for it was clear that the case was urgent—plunged in. The water was considerably out of his depth, despite his six feet. Fortunately it was beautifully clear. And in another minute, George and the child, a little boy of eight or nine years old, were both on the bank; the first none the worse for the adventure save a ducking, which left him not a dry thread of clothing between that and Woodbine Cottage—but the poor little boy in by no means equally good condition. The getting of him out of the water had not been a moment too soon. He was insensible when Fraser laid him on the bank; and though the sailor had had sufficient experience of such matters to be able to satisfy himself that the child would recover in a great measure, probably in a few minutes, it was impossible to leave him on the bank to his fate. Fraser hallooed as loudly as he could; but the people around the sheep washers, who were the nearest to the spot, were making such a din,

and were so intent on the rough fun and horse-play that was going on there, that he failed to draw the attention of any one.

There was nothing for it, therefore, eager as he was to return to the spot where he had left Miss Donne, but either to remain with the child until he should recover his consciousness, or to carry him as he was to the crowd around the sheep washers. But he was aware that the latter alternative was not the best mode for promoting the child's recovery. So, disagreeable as it was, he resigned himself to adopt the former ; and set himself assiduously to get the wet clothes off the poor little fellow, and to use such means for restoring him as his experience suggested.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHEEP-SHEARING.

IN the meantime, Bertha, though sorely tempted to scramble down the bank as best she might, to see what was the matter, and to render such assistance as is a woman's part on such occasions, nevertheless determined to do as she had been told, and to remain quietly where she was, till George should return to her. She heard him, after a few minutes, calling to the people further down the stream ; and she could tell, by the intonations of his voice, that the cries were not cries of urgent distress, and that there was no expression of alarm in them. He was merely calling for assistance. And very shortly she heard nothing more.

So she sat herself down on the bank at the spot where she had been left, and tried to think

of all Fraser had been saying to her, and of what he would assuredly recommence saying as soon as he came back, and strove to make up her mind not as to the purport of the answer she should give him, but as to the possibility and the means of putting that answer into the words which he pleaded so hard to obtain from her.

She was deeply immersed in this weighty consideration, very much fluttered, very nervous, very shaky, but for all that immensely happy at the bottom of her tremulous little heart, when she was suddenly startled by a movement among the trees behind her; and turning in quick alarm (not that she could have imagined that there was anything likely to happen to her or to hurt her there in the Artingale coppices in the broad daylight; but she was in a state of nervousness and agitation), she saw standing close behind her Mr. Garstang of Garstang Grange.

Then she did become frightened in earnest. In the first place, she felt sure, with an instantaneous conviction, that the man was there on her account; that his presence there was not accidental; that he had probably been watching

her ever since she had seen him that morning, when the presence of Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale had prevented him from speaking to her, as she had felt sure at the time it was his wish to do. Then, in the second place, there was something special about the man, which produced a singular effect of awe and alarm upon her. He had never spoken to her otherwise than civilly, and even respectfully; but the manner and look of Mr. Garstang frightened her. As for marrying him—even putting George Fraser wholly out of the question—Bertha would almost as soon of thought of marrying the Prince of Darkness! She had a kind of vague, half-confessed suspicion, indeed, that there was something of the nature of that personage about him. At all events, it was certain that she could not divest herself of a sort of superstitious feeling of terror connected with him. The long black hair, the large black eyes, the long straight nose, the long straight legs, and the long black boots; the glossy black velveteen, and the queer-shaped black hat, all contributed to produce a somewhat devilish appearance in little Bertha's imagination. Then it had become clearer than ever to

her that this Mr. Garstang was necessarily all that a man should not be; for was he not the most perfect contrast to George Fraser? The one man was sunshine, the other darkness; the one open as the day, and joyous as a summer morning, the other mysterious, seeming gloomy, and sad.

Mr. Garstang was all that unquestionably. Nevertheless he had been smitten with love for our bright, gay, smiling, brisk little Bertha. It is a bit of nature's usual wise cunning, I suppose, that often prompts men to seek in marriage not the counterpart, but the complement of their own idiosyncrasy. But nature, to have carried out her plan, should, it would seem, have made Mr. Garstang agreeable to Bertha. And that she had most signally failed in doing.

"Miss Donne," he said, speaking slowly, and in a deep, sepulchral voice, "I fear that I have startled you unpleasantly. It was not my purpose to do so. Forgive me. My purpose in watching for an opportunity of speaking to you alone was to obtain from you a definitive answer as to the fate that lies before me. For, Miss Donne, my fate is in your hands, and hangs

on your lips. And I solemnly conjure you, by all your own hopes of happiness, to pause before you decide on condemning me to despair."

He paused for some word from her, but none came. Her lips moved, indeed, but they gave forth no sound. She looked up at him with the scared and vacant look of one fascinated by the power of an evil eye.

"Of my love for you," he continued, "I have spoken, and I think so spoken that you cannot doubt of it. I am not altogether as other men are" (a candid avowal, the manifest truth of which seemed to enhance Bertha's terror of the man), "and am unable perhaps to speak to you as I should belike have spoken. But, Miss Donne, if the real and unchanging devotion of a life can avail to secure the happiness of a wife, that happiness would be yours, if you will consent to be mine. I do not suppose that you could be tempted, nor would I condescend to mention as a temptation to you the mere material advantages I could offer to you. You would be the honoured mistress of a good and comfortable home. And, Bertha, you would be the light, the sunshine, the joy, the providence, the salvation of that home and of more than one heart in

it. And this I do hold out to you as a temptation. I have not been a happy man, Bertha. I have been so much the reverse that my life has not fitted me to plead my cause with you, as lighter hearts might plead it. But, Bertha, the lightest heart is not mostly the most steadfast. Believe me—I implore you to believe me—that you never to your latest hour should have cause to repent having listened to the prayer and accepted the love of Wilfred Garstang.”

All this he said slowly, but not without passion, rather with a concentrated, deeply burning passion, which would have left little doubt on the mind of any third person that he was speaking with at least present sincerity. Again he waited for a reply, bending his tall figure slightly forwards towards her, and gazing into her face with intense earnestness, while his outstretched hands spoke not ineloquently the exceeding urgency of his prayer. And thus again he waited for his answer.

But still Bertha could not find words to give it to him. Not that she was unmoved, otherwise also than by alarm. Her eyes were full of tears as she looked up into his face, for the

exceeding and very evident earnestness of the man could not but affect her, still all she could do was to shake her head and wring her hands with distress.

“And this is all the answer vouchsafed to me,” said Garstang, his brow becoming yet darker as he spoke. “Am I then marked by nature as something odious and repellent, a man who never ought to have dreamed of love? Woman’s love is not for me, it seems. It is for any light-minded, easy, laughing fool that chooses to ask for it—but not for me. Am I then so hateful in your eyes, Miss Donne?”

Bertha looked up with streaming eyes and a face that seemed to implore the pity which was asked of her. But still she said nothing.

“Am I then hateful in your eyes, Miss Donne, I ask you?” said Garstang, again, with a something of sullen doggedness in his manner, which seemed as if in his despair he was determined to have some answer of some sort from her.

She tried to speak, becoming still more frightened, for there had come into the manner of the man a sort of menacing hardness and wild violence which was different from his

previous bearing, but her tongue seemed to refuse its office. At last, amid convulsive sobbing, she gasped, "No, no, I cannot—cannot never—never——"

Garstang dropped his arms to his sides, and advanced one step suddenly towards her, not with any definite object, assuredly not with the remotest idea of offering her any violence—probably his movement was merely an action of entreaty. But nervous and inclined to be frightened as Bertha was—morbidly timid at all times, and now rendered doubly so by the sort of vague unreasoned terror that Garstang inspired her with—she shrieked aloud, as his one stride brought him nearer to her. And in the same instant Fraser, bounding up the bank, was at her side.

His first movement was to throw himself between her and the man, who was now standing within a couple of yards of her, facing towards him, but with one arm stretched out backwards towards her, as with an instinctive action of protection.

The two men were nearly of equal height, the difference being, if anything, in favour of the American; and they stood for an instant facing

each other. It would have been strange to note—had any one been there to note it—the change which the passion of the moment wrought in Fraser's face. Had Lancaster seen him as he then looked, he would not have failed to draw from the observation confirmatory evidence in support of his theory of Fraser's parentage. The fair, bright, jocund face was no longer like itself, but it was still like the bearers of the name of Artingale—more like them than ever, perhaps. The present baronet was a dull, lymphatic man, and the present change in Fraser's countenance was not calculated to make him look more like such an one. But strange as it may seem that the fire of passion should bring out the likeness of a living young man to the features of the marble portraiture of an aged dead man, it is the fact that the change in Fraser's face caused him to resemble in a wonderfully striking manner that head of old Sir Hildebrand in the chapel, which Lancaster had sketched.

Kindly, genial, and beaming with good-nature and good-humour, as was the habitual expression of the young sailor's face, there was a fierce devil gleaming in his eye, and an iron hardness had come into the lines of his mouth

and chin, as he glared at the man opposite to him, which told plainly enough that there might be moods in which George Fraser would be a dangerous man to cross. Mr. Garstang, however, stood opposite to him to all appearance utterly unmoved. He had, when Fraser bounded in between him and Bertha, drawn himself together, so as to stand up at his full height. The same look of stony sadness remained immovable in his face. But a slight frown contracted his brow as he returned Fraser's point-blank look at him between the eyes, with a glance as direct though with less of the lightning of passion in it. Yet there was that in the expression of his eye which seemed to show that he too might be a dangerous man to deal with as an adversary.

“What is the meaning of this? What have you been saying to that lady, sir? Who are you, and what business have you here?” said Fraser, who appeared to be restraining himself with much difficulty from flying at the throat of the intruder.

“It has never been my habit,” returned Garstang, speaking very slowly, “to reply to questions asked in the tone in which you are

now speaking, young man. In the present case, I am more disposed to ask you all that you have chosen to demand of me."

"By the heaven above us, you shall answer, or pay dearly for your impertinence!" said Fraser, while his long fingers convulsively clenched and unclenched themselves in a manner which indicated that he was rapidly nearing the point at which he would no longer be able to keep his hand off the man before him. "You shall answer me," he continued; "and thus much I will answer you. My present business here is to protect this lady from your intrusion."

"And suppose I follow your example; and answer you so much, and in precisely the same words. My present business here is to protect this lady from *your* intrusion," replied Garstang, with a slight sneer. "I, at least," he added, in a somewhat less caustic tone, "am known to all the country side here—am, at all events, a 'sponsible man, and a householder"—and as he said the words, the sneer, though with a somewhat different expression, returned to his tone—"and I have still to learn whether you can show as good a title to be the lady's protector."

“Bertha, have I any title to be your protector? Will you give me that title? Will you, Bertha?” said Fraser, feeling perhaps that after all what the stranger said had some show of truth in it, as regarded the position in which each of them stood towards the other—partly, also, it may be, moved by the sudden thought that the incident which had occurred might thus be made the means of obtaining from Bertha’s shyness the avowal he had hitherto been unable to extort from her.

“Ay, that indeed is the question,” said Garstang, gravely, and with more of sorrow than of anger in his tone; “to which of us will Miss Bertha Donne accord the right to guard and to protect her? Should it be her declared wish to assign that position and that right to you—should it be her declared wish to be left here in your company alone, of course I cannot but obey her request. I will comply with it, when expressed, as surely as I shall refuse to admit you to any such position and right till such wish has been declared.” And Garstang, as he thus spoke, folded his arms across his chest, and drew himself up to his full height, as calmly awaiting the decision he had appealed to.

"Bertha!" cried Fraser, impatiently, "do you wish that I should drive away this man, who has dared to frighten you while I was away from you, or do you wish to be again alone with him?"

"I wish that he had not come here," said Bertha, tremulously, and in tones little above a whisper, when thus appealed to.

"And you wish him now to take himself off? Is not that it, dearest Bertha?" continued Fraser, still continuing to show a menacing front to the enemy.

"Yes," whispered Bertha, "I wish he would go away—and—and forgive me for refusing what he has asked—and for being frightened, and screaming out, just now."

"Yes, Miss Donne," said Garstang, sadly shaking his head, "I forgive your unnecessary alarm. And you wish me to leave you here alone with this young man? Remember, that there is only one circumstance that could justify you in wishing it, or me in complying with the wish."

"Bertha, dearest Bertha, what he says is true!" cried Fraser, turning from Garstang towards her, and taking a step towards her, so as to hang over her as she sat on the turf; "it

is true that I have no right to insist on being here alone with you, unless you will give me the right of being with you, and guarding you, and loving you," he added, dropping his voice as he uttered the last words, "for ever, and for ever. If you will not, if you cannot do this, I will not leave you here with him; but we will together go with you to the ladies you came here with. Speak, Bertha—my own Bertha; may I not say so?" he added, again dropping his voice to a whisper, as he hung over her.

"Yes," said Bertha, dropping her head on her bosom, and becoming crimson over all her face and neck, as she shyly stole her little hand into the large brown palm which Fraser held out to her to receive it. He raised her from her sitting posture, which she had hitherto maintained, and placing himself proudly by her side, and encircling her little waist with one arm, said—

"*Now*, Mr. Wilfred Garstang, I have the honour to request that you will abstain from further intruding on our privacy."

Poor George was very happy, very triumphant, and could not refrain from uttering this rather bombastic crow of satisfaction.

"*Now*, Mr.—whatever your name may be—I shall obey this lady's wishes. Yet I will, before I leave you, say one word. It has so chanced that I, and I only, have been the witness of the words which have passed between you and Miss Bertha Donne. I know her, and her friends. She has no natural male protectors. Should any of the results of what has passed here this day show that she has need of such, I, who have heard what has been said, shall consider myself as her protector. Good-bye, Miss Donne. Fare-you-well."

"Good-bye, Mr. Garstang. Do not be angry with me," said Bertha.

And with that Mr. Garstang began to ascend the bank, among the trees, with a slow and measured step.

Fraser turned from looking after him, and taking Bertha in his long strong arms, pressed her tiny little figure to his heart in a great, encircling, all-enveloping embrace.

"My own, my own Bertha, my darling, my wife!" he murmured, pressing his lips on the top of her head, just where the shining brown hair was parted.

For a few seconds she lay quiet, though pant-

ing, in his arms, with a grateful feeling of safety and security from all possible perils and evils from without. Then she gently disengaged herself, and for the first time perceiving that he was wet from head to foot, said, lifting her little hands in dismay, "Why, you have been into the river! You naughty, naughty boy, you are wet to the skin. You will catch your death of cold; and see what you have done to my pretty new dress. What *will* Miss Agnes say?"

"Yes, I jumped in—none the worse. My Bertha, my own, own darling, how happy I am. How happy you have made me. Bravo! Mr. Wilfred Garstang, I say. I declare I should never have got you to say yes, you little trembling birdie, without his help! I declare Mr. Garstang shall have a bit of cake, and dance at our wedding! Sha'n't he, my Bertha? And if ever you want any protector, because of the events of this day, why, you can apply, you know, to Mr. Garstang."

"No, no, no!" said Bertha, nestling up to his side. "He always frightens me so."

"But who is he, by-the-by; and what had he been saying to you? He had not said anything rude, I suppose?" said George, look-

ing quite ready to unsay very emphatically what he had been saying in his rival's favour, had such been the case.

"Oh, no, nothing at all. He is a farmer, and owns land himself, I believe—a very respectable man. And it was very foolish of me to cry out as I did, very foolish. But somehow he always frightens me," said Bertha, who seemed wonderfully to have regained the use of her tongue.

"But how did he frighten you, my precious darling? What had he been saying to you?" asked Fraser.

"Only—only that I—that he wanted me to promise to marry him. And I could not do that, you know, George," said Bertha, letting that name which was now, and henceforward, to her the dearest and most sacred of all possible combinations of letters fall from her lips in a barely audible whisper.

"And was that what frightened you? I suppose so; for you seemed very much terrified when I asked you the same thing. You did not scream out, to be sure," said Fraser.

"Now that is very naughty; you must not say that. As if there was any—any——"

“As if I looked as much like Lucifer as Mr. Garstang. That is what you mean, is it not?” said Fraser. “Is it the look of him that frightens you, my little one?”

“Yes; I think so. And then he speaks in such a grave, slow, serious manner; and——”

“And in short, you have no mind to become Mrs. Garstang?”

Bertha only replied by a little shudder. “But what will you do?” she said; “you cannot remain in these clothes. What was the matter down at the river there?”

“Boy fell in; couldn’t pull him out without jumping in myself. No time to pull clothes off. And then the stupid little brute went out of his senses; and I wanted so to get back to you, my Bertha. But it was impossible to leave him, and I could not make the people hear; and that’s why I was so long gone.”

“And did the child recover?” asked Bertha.

“Oh yes; after a little time. He was all right enough.”

“But now you positively must change your clothes as soon as possible,” said little Bertha, with an air of laying down the law.

“This is what comes of setting a mistress in

authority over one," said Fraser, with a mock expression of resignation.

"But first I am afraid you must take me back to the ladies," said Bertha, not minded for the chance of a second *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Garstang.

"We had better go down to where the washing is going on; they are all there," said George, proceeding to help his companion down the steep path to the bank of the stream.

"That is where the little fellow tumbled in," he added, pointing to the spot where the accident had happened, as they gained the bank; "it is a deep hole, deeper than one would think; water enough to drown a dozen such."

"And you jumped in just as you are!" said Bertha, stealing a glance at the tall handsome figure of her lover.

"There was no help for it, by Jove! I was not a bit too soon, I can tell you. He had sunk; and there was nothing of him to be seen when I got to the bank."

"How happy you must feel, to have saved his life!" said Bertha.

"I did not feel at all happy to be kept so long from getting back to where I had left you.

Now I feel happy. I suppose it is all because the little chap is not gone to Davy's locker," said Fraser, with a sly look into Bertha's face.

As Fraser had said, the main body of the people assembled were gathered round the spot where the washing was going on—the operation apparently which afforded the greatest amount of amusement. Four sturdy fellows were standing in the turbid water up to their armpits, and received the sheep as they were plunged into the pool by those on the bank. Of course an infinity of splashing and struggling gave rise to abundance of horse-play and rustic merriment. Sometimes a strong sheep would so perform his forced jump into the water as to all but upset one of the washers. Sometimes those who were throwing the sheep in had narrow escapes of falling in with them. Sometimes a more than ordinarily violent struggle close to the bank would send a heavy shower of muddy water over such of the spectators as had ventured too near the bank. And all and each of these catastrophes was motive sufficient for peals of laughter, and interchange of rustic witticisms, bawled from bank to bank with all the power of rustic lungs.

The child whose mishap had been the cause of Fraser's wetting had sufficiently recovered to be whipped and taken home by his mother, bawling his woes, as he went, in a manner that satisfactorily showed him to be little the worse for his ducking. And everybody there had by this time become acquainted with the story of the saving of his life; so that Fraser was a sort of hero of the day.

"Why, if here bea'nt Master Fraser with his wet things on, just as he come out of the water!" cried one woman, as he and Bertha came up to the crowd; "for the Lord's sake! sir, do'ey go and change, or you'll catch your death."

"Do you send un home, Miss Bertha, to change hisself; he'll go if you tells un," said another woman, with a sly look at her neighbour, to poor Bertha's infinite discomfiture.

"That's a deep hole, and a bad un, with on-safe banks, as you jumped into, sir," said one of the men in the water, looking up as Fraser approached. "I know un; and I don't know how you got out."

"Any way, the water was not so muddy as yours is," returned Fraser; and the reply was

received by the crowd as a witticism of the first water.

“George, my boy,” cried Captain Curling, who just at that moment came bustling up through the crowd; “don’t stand there without a dry rag on you; remember this ain’t salt water. All the difference. Take an old fellow’s advice; cut away to the cottage, and make all sail. Change your clothes, and come back. You’ll be in time for the dinner; and I’ll keep a place for you next Miss Bertha.”

“Should you mind staying with the captain, dearest, while I run to the cottage and change my things?” whispered George, in Bertha’s ear.

“Not a bit. Besides, we shall find Miss Agnes and Miss Mary in a minute. If Captain Curling is kind enough to let me stay with him?” she said, giving the old sailor a smile.

“Well, then, I will make the best of my way to the cottage. I shall be back in less than an hour.”

And with that Fraser went off up the valley at his best speed; and Captain Curling and Bertha threaded their way through the crowd in search of Miss Agnes and Miss Artingale.

“I suppose I can guess, Miss Donne, what you and my friend George have been at,” said the old captain, looking round slyly into her face as, tucked up under his arm, they made their way among the crowd.

Of course Bertha tingled all over, and felt creepy among the roots of her hair, and blushed every colour that it was possible to blush, and said nothing.

“Well; I congratulate you, my child, with all my heart; and I may do so very sincerely. For a better fellow than George Fraser I do not know, and I have known him almost all his life; and I have known a many.”

“You knew him in America, did you not, captain?” said Bertha.

“Yes, I knew him in his own country, and I knew his father before him, and I knew his grandmother—his father’s mother—I never knew his grandfather,” added the captain, thoughtfully.

“I suppose he was dead before you became acquainted with the family,” said Bertha, simply.

“Perhaps he was—and perhaps he wasn’t,” said the old man, oracularly, and somewhat to

his companion's surprise. "Let us go this way, and have a look at the shearing," added the captain, feeling little Bertha's arm pulling him slightly in a different direction.

"No, don't let us go that way, please, Captain Curling, the ladies won't be there," pleaded Bertha, still drawing him in an opposite direction.

"Why, what's the matter? Oh, I see. There's young Hathaway there, and you don't want to fall in with him, eh? I heard all about his coming to you at the cottage, you know; a stupid fellow, steering right athwart another man's course. But of course, my dear, you have told George all about it. He did not like it at the time, I can tell you."

"I have not said a word to Mr. Fraser about it, and he has never asked me," said Bertha, with a little more spirit than was usual with her. "I am sure," she added, "that he knows there is nothing to tell."

"Nothing at all that you need be ashamed of telling, my dear. We all know that. But he did not come to the cottage for nothing, you know, and I think—you will excuse an old man—I think you ought to tell him as is to

be your husband what the man came there for."

"He came to find out something he wanted to know from my grandmother," said Bertha.

"Yes, so I have understood—something about the marriage of her old master, the late baronet, as I have heard," said the captain, jesuitically.

And Bertha, forgetting in the newly-born sense of confidence and safety which had come over her exactly how much she had confided to Lancaster, and her charges to him to keep it secret, and having infinitely less than before the fear of Mr. Jonas Hathaway before her eyes, answered, simply, "Yes, something or other about it. I don't rightly know what."

"Do you know what he found out from your grandmother?"

"I don't think he found out anything; I don't understand what it was that he wanted to find out," replied Bertha.

"How did your grandmother take it—his coming cross-questioning her in that way in her own house?" asked the captain.

"Grandmother did not like it at all. She was quite put out about it. I think it kept her

awake all the night afterwards. She kept tossing and turning in her bed, and talking to herself. I never saw her so put out."

"She did not say anything about it afterwards?" inquired the captain, after meditating for a while, and speaking in a manner that would have at once warned anybody less simple and unsuspicious than little Bertha, that she was being anxiously cross-questioned, but which the captain deemed to be the perfection of nonchalant ease, and which, with an examinee still less guileless than himself, succeeded completely.

"Yes, indeed. She talked of nothing else all the next day. She said over and over again that she knew nothing about it—that it was no good coming to her—that if any wrong had been done, she knew nothing about it. You don't think, Captain Curling," she added, quickly, as, looking up into the old man's face, she surprised there a look of deep thoughtfulness, "you don't think that Mr. Jonas can do grandmother any harm?"

"Lord, no; what harm should he do her? Those lawyer chaps are so curious, that is all."

And very soon after that they fell in with Miss Agnes and Lancaster, and all four together went

in search of Mary and Mr. Felix Farland—for they too had been somewhere *tête-à-tête* all this time.

Mr. Decimus Oblong was wont to maintain, as one of the arguments in favour of the keeping up of the annual sheep-shearing festival, that an examination of the parish registers for a series of years would show from the great number of marriages solemnized within a couple of months afterwards, that the gathering in question tended greatly to promote the frame of mind necessary for entering into that holy and happy state. Mr. Decimus Oblong was an old bachelor, and had strong opinions upon this point. On the present occasion, we have seen that one marriage was that day determined on. Whether a second, and that the most important one in all North Sillshire, was to date its arrangement from that same day remains to be seen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR AND MR. JONAS.

MR. JONAS HATHAWAY, Member of the College of Surgeons and general practitioner at Billiford, commonly called Dr. Hathaway, or more commonly still, "the Doctor," was an active and useful member of society, and much esteemed in his native town and its neighbourhood. He was a coarse man, as members of his branch of the healing profession were wont to be in those days; not highly educated originally, but, shrewd, clever, observant, he had by this time, when he was not far from seventy, educated himself into a very tolerable degree of general efficiency. He was a cheery, brisk, jovial man, knowing, as the neighbouring country gentlemen would have told you, his own place and his own station; and was accordingly a popular

man. It never would have occurred to him to dream of imagining himself on a social equality with Dr. Blackwood, M.D., who dressed always in complete black, wore powder and pigtail wig, owned a small estate and pretty little house in the environs of Billiford, and rarely did anything in the way of his profession, save occasionally when summoned to the bedsides of some of the members of the county families, who chose to die with proper ceremonies *secundum artem*. There was always a good-natured word between the M.D. and "the Doctor," when they chanced to meet, and generally—if no profane ears were within hearing—some little joke at the expense of the doctor's patient *en permanence*, the Lady Lavinia Artingale. But each knew his station perfectly well, and kept it after the fashion of the old George III. days. "The Doctor" had brought into the world a very large proportion of the younger generation, who were growing up around him. And an allusion to this circumstance on most occasions of meeting between the old man and any one of these formed an unfailing part of his conversation, and was by common consent recognized to be of the nature of a joke, calling for a laughing

blush, if the patient were of the softer sex, and for some rejoinder in kind, if otherwise—all according to the fashion of the day when George III. was king.

The doctor was still an active man; might still be seen riding his old cob in all weathers through the Sillshire lanes in the neighbourhood of Billiford; and if he were gradually—to the sometimes grumbling discontent of his patients—devolving some of the harder and further a-field work on young Mr. Jackson, his assistant, he was still far from considering that his own time for *otium cum dignitate* had come.

So much so that the doctor's dinner at one o'clock was a very uncomfortable and unsatisfactory affair; a mere snatching of a morsel of necessary food, a little earlier or a little later as the case might be, and ever in haste. But *en revanche* the doctor expected that his supper at eight in the evening should be a comfortable meal, with something of leisure and repose attending it.

It was the sweet hour of gloaming in the early part of July, some week or ten days after the sheep-shearing, the hour which, as the old Greek pastoral poet sings, “brings all things

with it, meat and wine, and the child home to its mother," and the doctor had just finished supping *tête-à-tête* with his son, the attorney. Miss Lucy had gone out to tea, which was the form generally assumed by the dissipation of the rank and fashion of Billiford. Mr. Jonas had been expected at the party in question; and he was not wont usually to absent himself from such social gatherings. But on the present occasion he had preferred a *tête-à-tête* supper with his father to all the seductions of tea and tea-cake, mild flirting, and a hand at loo—somewhat to the surprise of the old gentleman, who did not quite understand till after supper this unusual filial attention.

The father and son were very tolerably good friends, and got on very well together whenever they met: but there were certain points of natural antagonism about their characters, which prevented them from much seeking of each other's society. The father was, as has been said, a coarse man; but he was also in a rough and very unsentimental sort of way a large-hearted man. The son was a smart, neat, precise, and though in the eye of the law and of law-made consciences an upright, was a narrow-

hearted man. His father, however, was content with him, and proud of him in a way, as fathers are of sons who have been successful in some very different walk from their own. Jonas had been a good boy, obedient, diligent, and pains-taking, a diligent, pains-taking, and respectable young man. He had never, since his first start in life, come to his father for a shilling; and was, if not quite at the present moment, yet in a fair way very shortly to be a richer man than his father was, or ever had been. Of course it was satisfactory to have such a son. Look at poor old Briggs, the land-surveyor and estate valuer, carrying his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave in deep and bitter poverty, a broken and broken-hearted man, and all by reason of a scapegrace son. Yes; such a son as Mr. Jonas Hathaway, a gent. and attorney-at-law, was something to be thankful for. And it was a great thing for his long since motherless Lucy to have such a brother to look to.

But for all that the society of his son was not that which was most pleasant to the old doctor. He felt repressed, and not altogether at his ease in his company, and was, in fact, at the bottom of his heart a little bit afraid of him. As for

Mr. Jonas, he thought his father well enough, as fathers went. But he was not inclined to think highly of the race in general. They were curiously enough apt to be behind the time. And Mr. Jonas especially contemned anything or anybody to which that reproach could be attached. If he had been seriously ill, Mr. Jonas would have called Mr. Simpson, a young man from London recently established at Billiford, to his bed-side. *C'est tout dire*. Fortunately for his old father's feelings, Jonas had never been seriously ill.

Under these circumstances the doctor was secretly, perhaps, more flattered than really pleased at the unwonted piece of attention which had brought Mr. Jonas to sup with him, instead of attending the tea party at the Miss Filbers, one of the best houses in Billiford. However, honour and comfort do not always visit us together. The doctor made the most of the honour, and got a bottle of his best port from the cellar in his son's honour. Mr. Jonas, on his part, had made himself rather more agreeable than usual; and the supper had passed pleasantly enough on the whole.

The cloth had been removed, but at least

half the bottle of old port remained to be discussed; and the better to enjoy it, the father and son had moved their chairs to the window looking on the well-kept little bit of flower-garden at the back of the doctor's house. It was then that the senior became aware why he had been honoured by the company of his aspiring and well-to-do son.

"A queerish sort of thing happened to me the other day, sir," began Mr. Jonas, "which I have been thinking of mentioning to you. You know I am not given to talk about the affairs of my clients. It ain't professional; and it ain't my way. Nor am I in the habit of asking advice from anybody, at least in matters which a solicitor should understand. I flatter myself I can see my way through an Act of Parliament or a deed as well as here and there another."

"Not a doubt of that, Jonas. And if you couldn't, it would not be to me that you would come to help you, I am thinking," said his father, a little dryly.

"Of course not. But this is another guess matter; and I thought I would tell you, more for the curiosity of the thing than anything else—and because I fancied that it would interest you."

The doctor filled his own and his son's glass, and awaited in silence the sequel to so unusual an introduction.

"You know," said Mr. Jonas, sipping his wine, and smacking his lips after it—a little bit of delicate flattery which his father was quite conscious was intended to propitiate him, and by which, notwithstanding this knowledge, he *was* propitiated—"You know, I think, that the title deeds and other papers connected with the Artingale property were placed in my hands some weeks ago, for the purpose of arranging a security—a sort of collateral and contingent security I may call it—for a loan of a large sum of money to be advanced by my client Mr. Farland to the baronet. Of course I speak to *you*, my dear father, in perfect confidence, you know, and should not mention even that much elsewhere."

"All right, Jonas; any secrets are safe with me, my boy—the more so that I am sure to have forgotten them by to-morrow morning," said the doctor.

"You won't forget what I am going to tell you, I'll go bail, sir," said his son. "Now look here, father," he continued, putting his hand on his father's coat-sleeve, and dropping his voice;

“among those papers—it tumbled out from the folds of one of them, and had evidently been left there by accident—I found a letter from a certain Mr. Julius Harding, who seems to have been attorney and confidential adviser to the late baronet, Sir Hildebrand’s father, addressed to his client, Sir George Artingale.”

Mr. Jonas paused to observe what effect this announcement of his discovery might produce upon his listener. But the doctor only said, quietly, “Well, what of that. You sent it, I suppose, to the baronet.”

“No, sir, I did not. And I should not have known my duty if I had done so—under the circumstances, observe sir—under the circumstances. No; in the first place, I of course felt it to be my duty to read the letter carefully. It is the bounden duty of a professional man to make himself acquainted with the nature and contents of all the papers put into his hands, which may—*may*, I say—concern the interests of his client. I suppose you see that I am right there, sir,” and Mr. Jonas paused for a reply.

“I suppose so; you know best, Jonas. It seems to me rather drastic practice, but you know best,” said the old man, a little uneasily.

“Depend upon it, I do, sir. Well, I read Mr. Julius Harding’s letter, and what do you think I found in it?” said Mr. Jonas, and again paused.

“Heaven only knows; a bill of no end of six and eightpences, I should say,” returned his father.

“Now, father I am not joking, and I think it would be as well if you were to abstain from sneering at a profession which has done more for your son than all the pills and draughts ever did for you. Let the six and eightpences alone, if you please.”

“Certainly, Jonas, certainly. I have a great respect for them. I wish I could charge six and eightpence for every visit I make, I know. Well, what did you find in the letter?”

“Why, sir, I found, not proofs, mind—I am very far from saying that I found anything of the sort—not proofs, but very strong reasons for supposing that Sir George Artingale, the father of the present baronet, was a married man, with a wife living at the time he married the Lady Geraldine, the Earl of Foxley’s daughter, and who became the mother of the present Sir

Hildebrand, and of his sister, Miss Agnes Artingale. That is all."

"Nonsense, Jonas. How can you talk such stuff. For God's sake, put all such stories out of your head. Why, if it were true that Sir George—I remember him well enough, and can't say that I remember any good of him—if Sir George had a wife living when he married Lady Geraldine—I remember her too, poor lady—his son could never have inherited the title and the estates."

"Put it out of my head! That's a good one—and very easy said. Of course the present baronet—so called and considered—would not have inherited, and ought never to have had possession of the title or the estates. That is just it. What if he has been a wrongful possessor all these years? What if there be now living, as there well may be, some rightful claimant? And what if Jonas Hathaway, attorney-at-law of Billiford, be the only man living who has any knowledge of such wrong, and any clue to the righting of it? Don't you begin to be awake to the real nature of the case, old gentleman?"

"It is all impossible, out and out impossible, I tell you," said the doctor, aghast at the bare

contemplation of such a catastrophe as that to which his audacious son's words seemed to point. "And, Lord bless me! if there were any such possibility, why, it would be better a hundred times to chuck the cursed letter into the fire, and never breathe a word of it to any mortal soul. Wife living! why, who in the name of—but it is all stuff and nonsense, and I won't believe a word of it."

"Nobody wants you to believe a word of anything you prefer not to believe. And besides, you are going a deal quicker than I want you to go, or want to go myself, for that matter. Mind, I said that the letter contains no proofs. It does not enable me to prove that Sir George Artingale was ever married before he married the Lady Geraldine. And if I could prove that, I could not prove—as far as I yet see my way—that such first wife was living at the time of the second marriage. But it looks very like it. I say that it looks very suspicious. There was a question of a marriage with another woman—unfortunately, she is not named—and a question of getting rid of her; and this must have been very shortly previous to the marriage with the Lady Geraldine."

“But in any case, Jonas, what is all this to you? What would you do but harm in bringing up any such old stories? The late Sir George was not good for much, as I have said. But the present baronet is a worthy, good sort of man as one could wish. He is respected by all the country side. And, my heart alive, what would Lady Lavinia say, if any hint of such wild tales were to come to her ears. I would not answer for the consequences. I would not, indeed,” said the worthy doctor, with true professional enthusiasm.

“Fortunately, you would not be called on to answer for the consequences, sir,” returned his son. “But you do not seem to me to realize the nature of the situation. Supposing Sir George Artingale to have had a wife living at the time he married the mother of the present baronet, then he—the present man—is an illegitimate child, and can have no claim to the title or estates, and there must be *somebody*—somebody, I say—who has a legitimate title to them. If, in that case, there be male issue of Sir George’s first and only valid marriage, such issue would be heir to the estates. If, on the other hand, there were no issue by the first wife still living at the

time of the bigamous marriage with the second, then the rightful claimant of the title and estates would be the representative of a younger branch of the family ;—there *are* such in the north of England, I have ascertained *that* much. *Now* do you begin to be awake, sir ?” said Mr. Jonas, who had made the above lucid statement sitting with his perky, trim little figure bolt upright in his chair, but a little bent forwards from the hips towards his father, and emphasising each position of his dilemma with abundant use of demonstrative fingers.

“I am awake, Jonas, as you call it,” said his father, after some little pause ; “but I do not see anything but trouble and mischief that can come from your meddling in this matter. Ten to one it is all a mistake, and——”

“What is a mistake, sir ?” interrupted his son, speaking much after the fashion in which a steel trap closes on the limb which has touched the spring of it.

“Why, that there was anything wrong about Sir George’s marriage.”

“I make no mistake, if you please to observe, sir,” snapped his son ; “I don’t say there *was* anything wrong ; I only say that there are

sufficiently suspicious circumstances to justify inquiry."

"What circumstances?" asked the doctor.

"Why, a letter from Sir George's lawyer, as I have told you, speaking of the departure of a woman for the colonies, adverting to the claim of that woman to be the lawful wife of Sir George, remarking that the truth of that claim was best known to Sir George himself and his own conscience, but, if I am not mistaking, betraying in the tone of the writer a disposition to believe that the claim was a well-founded one. And that letter was written within a few weeks of the second marriage."

"And that is all," cried the doctor, visibly relieved; "no doubt there was some woman to be got rid of: Sir George was just that sort of man. A bad fellow from top to bottom. Give her a sum of money and ship her off to the colonies; leave the stage clear for an alliance with the Lady Geraldine Tarlatane; nothing more likely. Woman declared that she was his wife; gave trouble; lawyer employed; all quite likely. But can you imagine, Jonas, for a moment, that any woman would have suffered herself to be so shipped off, if she were really

married? Pooh! the women know their rights a little better than that comes to. Can you suppose that if such a thing were planned, a respectable London lawyer would be employed in it? Just think of it."

"I have thought of every bit of it; a precious deal more than you have, sir, or would, if you was to think from now till Christmas. I don't know that Mr. Julius Harding *was* a respectable lawyer, as you say. I do know that he was none the more likely to be so, because he was a London lawyer, as you seem to imagine. But what if he was ever so respectable? He didn't *know* that the woman was married; though I think that he suspected it. Then, as for the woman: probably she did not *know*. There may be doubts; there may be nice questions whether a marriage is a marriage or not. There may be cases, specially t'other side of the Scotch border, where a man not intending to be married may be married fast and tight; there may be cases in which he may plan the whole thing to deceive a woman, and be married when he only meant to pretend to be married. There may be cases where a man knows he is married safe enough, but is able to put it out of a

woman's power to prove that she is married," argued Mr. Jonas, with great volubility.

"And how do you think that you can prove a marriage now, fifty years afterwards, which the woman married could not prove at the time? Is that likely, Jonas?"

"Not so unlikely, sir, perhaps, as you may think. I am Jonas Hathaway, attorney-at-law, afraid of no man; she was a poor woman—probably a poor and friendless woman—ignorant of law and of everything else, timid, helpless, and cowed by the man who had got the better of her. I think I see a difference in the two cases, sir," said Mr. Jonas, rubbing his hands cheerily, and compressing his two thin lips closely together.

"No doubt, Jonas, no doubt; but what is it you propose to do in the matter? And what but mischief, as I said, can come of doing anything?" said the senior.

"What I propose to do, sir, is to make inquiry — cautiously. I have already made inquiry, cautiously. What I want, is to come at the truth. That is what every honest man wants, or ought to want, I suppose, isn't it, sir? When I have got at the truth, then it will be

time to think of what is to be done next. But it does strike me, that if I manage the matter well—in such a manner as not to give unnecessary pain or trouble to anybody, it may come to this, that—the—title—and—estates—of—Artin-gale—may—be—at—the—disposal—of—your very humble servant,” said Jonas, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, and laying a separate emphasis on each word of the astounding statement.

“Well, Jonas, I don’t like it; and I wash my hands of it. It lies out of my line,” said his father.

“Oh, yes; it is all very well to wash your hands, and say things are not in your line. But how can you help yourself when things come across your line? You can’t run away from them. Now the question is for you, what can you best do to be of use to your old patron and neighbour, Sir Hildebrand, in this matter. You tell me to keep all quiet. Perhaps that is what I shall think it best to do. But then one must know the truth; you don’t expect to cure a man if he won’t tell you what is really the matter with him, do you? The first thing is to get at the true facts. Now the more

quietly this can be done, the better for the family at the Castle. And feeling this, it has seemed to me that you might possibly be able to ascertain without frightening anybody whether there is, or ever has been anything known or heard of a previous—of a—of an *entanglement*—that is the word—of Sir George Artingale before he married the Lady Geraldine Tarlatane.”

“I ascertain? How the devil would you have me set about ascertaining? You say you have already been making inquiries.”

“Yes; and I flatter myself I hit upon a clue that is likely to be of service. When I first set myself to think of all the possibilities of the case, I thought of old Hannah at the cottage in the park. She was an old servant in the family in Sir George’s time, you know. She was left comfortably off by him. He was not a likely man to provide for an old servant out of mere kindness of heart. Who so likely as an old servant to have been a witness at a secret marriage whether real or pretended? So I went to work there first—very cautiously. The old woman is as close as wax. But she was frightened. She knows something about some-

thing or other; I am sure she knows something," said Mr. Jonas, with a manner and an expression of face that might have reminded one of an eager terrier when he first gets the scent of a rat.

"And what would you have me do in the matter, pray?—not that I mean to do anything, so I tell you," said the doctor; who, despite himself, could not help beginning to feel an interest of curiosity on the subject.

"Simply this: you have opportunities enough, Heaven knows, of talking with Lady Lavinia. Sound her; take care of course to begin far enough off. You might begin to talk of old times; of Sir George, and his ways; of the Lady Geraldine; of——"

Mr. Jonas suddenly stopped the current of his words with a violent jerk, jumped from his chair, and, violently clapping his right hand on his forehead, exclaimed—

"By all that's holy I have it! I've got it! As sure as eggs is eggs I have it."

"What have you got? and what on earth is the matter with you?" said his father, greatly astonished, for it was not at all like Mr. Jonas' usual prim and accurate manner and bearing to

be thus carried away by the violence of his emotions.

“I tell you, I see it all. Wonderful ! wonderful !” said Mr. Jonas, reseating himself, and looking into his father’s face with excited, staring eyes.

“What on earth have you got into your head now ? Why, Jonas, you are not like yourself to-night,” said the surprised doctor.

This last was a reproach to which the young attorney was not insensible.

“That’s true, father,” he said, in a quieter tone ; “and I don’t mean to make a fool of myself. Though upon my word a fellow might be excused for it, if he ever could be, when he sees such a real interposition of Providence as this here. I say,” continued Mr. Jonas, solemnly impressed with the power of such manifestations to cause a man to make a fool of himself, “I say that I see the finger of God in it, a-pointing to a false title and a writ of ejectment, if ever it pointed yet.”

“As soon as you are ready to explain what you mean, and what you are talking about, I am ready to listen to you, Jonas. But I don’t know you to-night, I don’t indeed. Wake me

when you have done with your reflections on Providence." And the doctor threw himself back in his Windsor chair, and affected to close his eyes.

"Come, don't go to sleep, father. You'll be interested in this, I can tell you. The wonder is that we neither of us hit it before. What should you say if the rightful heir to the title and estates of Artingale was now here in Billiford: if he was walking about among us, knowing nothing about it, nor who he was nor what he was; if he was brought here from a distant country by mere hap-hazard? Don't you call that Providence? And now I ask you if George Fraser is not the man?" said Mr. Jonas, shaking his forefinger at his father, in a manner which seemed to him to be a fitting rhetorical enforcement of the claims of Providence to have its operation in the matter recognised.

"Yes; I have been thinking of Mr. Fraser. Don't you remember, Jonas, that I remarked the first night we ever saw him—that dinner-party at Farlandstoke—that he was wonderfully like the family," said the doctor, with a quietness that was both astounding and provoking to his son.

“Been thinking of it!” he cried, “then why in the world did you not say so? Do you mean to say that it struck you that George Fraser must be the son of the late Sir George Artingale?” said Mr. Jonas, angrily.

“Certainly it occurred to me since you have been talking about the circumstance of the late Sir George having had some affair with a woman before his marriage, that it was likely enough that a man so wonderfully like the Artingale face should be in fact some such by-blow of the late baronet. But how about this young man’s age, Jonas? He would be far too young to be the late baronet’s son,” remarked the doctor, looking up into his son’s face.

“Then if it occurred to you, why in the name of heaven did you not say so? And as to the age, I have already thought of that. This Fraser would be just about the age to be Sir George’s grandson. But why not say what was in your mind?” inquired his son, with genuine surprise.

“Well, I daresay I might have done so at some time, sooner or later. But what is there in it?” said the doctor.

“In it! Why, everything is in it. This man

comes from the colonies, as they called them in those days. Where was this woman sent off to by Sir George? why to the colonies. George Fraser, I would stake my hand upon it, is the grandson of that woman!" said Mr. Jonas, with returning excitement.

"But what then? that is all very likely. His likeness to the family makes it, I grant, *very* likely. But it does not follow that his mother was ever Sir George Artingale's *wife*. And that is very unlikely. And that is what you want to prove," remarked the old man.

"All right, sir. That is what has to be seen to, and, if possible, proved. *I* think it not so unlikely. Looking to the general tone of Mr. Harding's letter, who, by the way, I may admit *was* probably too respectable a man to be trusted with the truth of the story; and who, to all appearances, was not entrusted with the secret—looking, I say, to the general tone of his letter, and still more the manner and words of that old woman at the cottage, I do not think it unlikely. But that is the fact to be got at, and got at cautiously. For it remains to be seen what would be one's duty, if one had the means of proving the first marriage in one's hand. Of

course there would be the consideration of the distress and trouble that would be caused at the Castle yonder, on the one hand, and there would be the legal claim to be considered, on the other hand. It would require consideration—much consideration,” said Mr. Jonas, with a speculative look in his cold grey eye. And that consideration,” he continued, “you may be very sure that I should give it. But the first thing, as I said, is to get at the facts. Of course it would not do to say a word to any living creature—least of all to that Mr. Fraser himself.”

“He would probably be able to throw no light at all on the matter. My notion is that it would be best to say nothing and think nothing more about the matter at all,” said the doctor, getting up from his chair.

“Upon that point, if you please, sir, I must be allowed to follow my own judgment—a judgment, father, which you will allow has carried me along pretty well through the world thus far. Meantime, I am sure you will not refuse the little help I asked of you just now. *That* can do no harm to anybody, you know. And you’re not doing so won’t stop me from following up the scent in other ways, you may depend

upon it," said Mr. Jonas, getting his hat, for he knew that the hour was come when his father would go out to make his last evening round among his patients.

The doctor felt that he might very securely depend on his son Jonas not neglecting to follow up any scent, which might appear to his discriminating nostrils to have an odour of possible profit in it.

"Well, I must go now to my evening round," he said; "but I will think over what you have been saying."

"And in any case I am sure, father, that you will feel that no word of this must be breathed to any one. I may trust to you for that," said Mr. Jonas, as they prepared to quit the house together.

"Of that you may be quite sure, my boy. I shall put my fishing-rod into no such troubled waters, you may depend upon it. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. I think I shall look in at Miss Filber's, and then I can walk home with Lucy."

"Do; but I say, Jonas, you won't think of saying anything about this to her? Best not."

“Lord, sir! Do you think I am an idiot? Talk to a girl about such a matter! why, what can you be dreaming of?”

“Good-night, then,” said the doctor, again.

“Good-night, sir,” responded the son, muttering to himself, as he turned away, “I should not wonder if he were to get something out of Lady Lavinia. I can see his curiosity is all agog, for all he pretends to take it so quietly. And I know he sits chattering for hours with the old woman, and charges well for the work too—as he ought.”

And therewith Mr. Jonas presented himself at the door of the cottage *ornée* of the Miss Filbers; and was received with a torrent of flattering reproaches for being so late, from the assembled young-lady-dom of Billiford.

END OF VOLUME II.



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